Eros in Poetry and Prose: Book Three



by

Patrick Bruskiewich

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Eros in Poetry and Prose

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Cover: Louise Brooks, Movie Star, 1920

{See the piece Making an Ass of Herself}

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She did not want
to grow up,
to know love and sex,
and beget children ...

The Eros in Poetry and Prose Series

Eros in literature is one of the finest and most sublime way to share one's love.

The purpose of the ***Eros in Poetry and Prose*** Series is to share some of the most amorous and enticing pieces of poetry and prose to be found in the English Language. This is the third book in the series. Its release coincides with Valentine's Day 2017.

In this edition you will find 30 original poems and 10 pieces of prose from 2016 and 2017 written by the author, all meant to tickle your fancy ...

The award winning short prose *My First Crush* is included. The prize I won for this 200 word story I donated to the Emergency Room Nurses at Lions Gate Hospital in North Vancouver in memory of my dear friend ...

Enjoy!

Patrick Bruskiewich
Vancouver, BC, Canada

POETRY

Haiku My Way Up

Life is a steep hill
but do I mind? I want to
Haiku my way up.

And as We Reach our Journey's End

Our beginnings never know our ends.
Are our passions wrong or right?
We hide away so, we tell our friends
it is the world that gives us fright.

We have wondered much of late
whether it's lust, or is it love?
What could possibly be our fate
when of each other we have had enough?

I am quite sure you would understand
as through the afternoon in bed we talked.
Then I felt the coldness of your hand
and your indifference as you dressed.

Our candour is our Achilles heel –
t'is always best to tell the truth
and tell the other how you feel,

before bitterness takes it root

And as we reach our journey's end
have we not much happiness to recount
will we remain true, loved friends,
or perhaps ... sadness is all that life's about?

All That I Will Have to Remember You By

It is the middle of the night,
and I miss you oh so much.
I have written you a poem
and now I will try to sleep

What dreams may come
when I shuffle through the night.
I miss you oh so much ...
you won't be here when I wake up

But at the very least I know
the words I wrote will remind me
of you, and that's perhaps
all that I will have to remember you by

And Shadows Will Creep Away

My shadow crept across the floor
It stretched as far as time permit
and marched its way beyond the door
far into the empty hall beyond.

It mark the impending step of time
when friendship lasts a little while
and misadventures are a crime
boxed as a captive on trodden tiles.

What does one do as sadness comes?
When grief and sorrow and pity lands
hard upon a worn out face that some
short moment before knew great happiness.

It says "*trust no one!*" surely not yourself!
Go to and hide behind your shadow.
Do not bear to show your face
on which tears stream pitied, lo.

Let this outcast light creep away.
The darkness comes and hide. Let no
one touch your solemn heart, pray
set yourself against the world … go …

End not as a forgotten captive
of the misdeeds of others, who
choose not to understand your life
and do what tortuous harm they do.

Well, a person cannot be an isle …
done entire of themselves, they say.
Yet I know fate will, in a while
lend lasting refuge from rueful days.

And shadows will creep away
do mischief to others, fear
do return when some unfutured day
my eyes forever are dried of tears.

I wish not to be left alone,
far from even you, my shadow …
Friend, if time heals all earthy wounds
seek me not too long tomorrow …

For then I shall be your shadow
and creep across your trodden floor
to whisper quietly into your ear
that I am here no more.

That What Makes Me King

Love and Lust, Croesus' touch
Is everything ever enough?
We fancy all, our paradise found
until it just comes crashing down.

What then we ask?
We have our health.
But not our wealth.
Foul weather friends … perhaps.

Long wrinkles on our honest face.
Gray hair and an aged grace.
Wisdom gained through our malchance
and misfortune's many happenstance.

Neither empire, nor clothes have we
to hide our person's indignity
We are ourselves and not much more
Are we really, truly poor?

Do we need love? I guess we do
As for lust, does any count matter.
Lift me to the happiness of day
amidst the pillows of soft maternity.

Wealth is hidden somewhere else perhaps
In words, why not in words?
Gold coinage long do not here last
when humanity is our pressing trade.

Who remembers Shakespeare's banker?
The cloth cut by Milton's tailor?
A sweet from Albert's baker?
Aye or Joyce's doctor, who?

Care not, we have more pressing
Matters, which pricks our fancy
amidst soft folds, love's perfume
and pleasures – that what makes me king.

Past these Hours … at Twilight's Gate

I howled at the moon
The moon frowned back
It floats a shiny balloon
Alight against the black.

Above the sombre of this bay
Soft temper reflected twice
Once from a face, again away
Over calm waters, still and nice.

Who brands me! A lunacy
Amongst sane people, maybe not.
As for I, pray let me be
And you, just don't get caught.

For us all, night's madness waits
Even genii, in spirit and in thought
Past these hours … at twilight's gate
When respite cannot be bought.

I shed now all my clothes
And make my way to bed
In fear my eyes I close
For I may soon be dead.

Awake I can do know
The passage of measured time
A heart that beats, the blow
A damaged neck and spine.

But when I sleep I cannot tell
A dream from what is real
My life it is a hell
Soon to heaven I may steal.

These words that I do light

I scribe by inconstant moon
And you my friend just might
By chance, ere tu, you join me soon.

No Going Back

There is a before,
And there is an after, as well
As no going back

So Near Yet Distant Can It Be

But soft this moon lit night
sits gentle atop the bay
opposed by Cassiopeia's might
it whispers … whats it say?

Look down upon its mortal men
far shores reached by handsome few.
It circles earth but once again
before this month is through.

It brings the surges, mighty wash
to cleanse the kindly soul.
Upon emotive shores are tossed

the gallant, strong and bold.

Betwixt the twenty days and eight
wild ostriches and elephants do roam
Those games that men and woman wait
to play get written up in poem.

The stars do twinkle oh so bright
each and every one so named.
Their passion do draw us fright
then calmness once they came.

That little death we die
for our two fortune's sake.
Once more again we try
and pray our efforts take.

So near yet distant can it be
the gentleness of newfound youth
when seventy and two hundred days,
sees grand issuance of human truth.

The other side we dare to hide
we cannot find the words.
In emptiness our hearts abide
the pitied, barren and the hurt.

Yet soft, a moon lit night
sits gentle above the bay.
Behold such beauteous sight
Blue eyes … cast newborn gaze.

You Can See That in My Math

I am Bohemian
… really I am

I am as flighty as the clouds
The rain is my tears

The sky is never gray
My sun, it shines all the time

The Caravan of my life
Never lingers long in one place.

Numbers define my universe
Expanding, I mathematique!

Genius is how God thinks
of me, no dust in my eyes.

The rest of humanity, well

seems to sleep unsettled.

My calculation is sinh(x).
Everything important is relative

You can see that in my math
Really … I am bohemian.

Let Us Portray All Things of Beauty in our Art

Let us portray all things of beauty in our art
that is the essence of life and light.
And praise the dignity of our heart
speak majestic words, both good and right.

Our dreams are creativity found
by colour, perspective and curved lines.
We draw the measure of all around,
the dissimilar, disjoint, the rough, the kind

What difference is there between art and life …
Between future, present or past?
That what delivers our happy strife
the fleeting or the things that last.

If artists are not the ones to lift

up the sad and forgotten man
what there is worth our god given gift
For is there anyone else who really cares?

The Strong have Conquered Us the Weak

We know despair, we always do
Through the loss of beauty, something sacred.
A goddess perhaps keeps watch so
Nemesis does, in due course we are punished.

Grand monuments crumble, our city disappears
Darks shadows overtake the light.
The hollow wind wails in anguish, the end is near
Before long we shall lose our fight.

We are mortal! The passage of time seems endless.
Our thoughts once writ are easily forgotten, so they say.
So let us etch them in stone and make them priceless
This shall outlast our lives by many a day.

But once the last of us has spoke
Who then can understand of what we speak?
Our lives, our loins drift away like smoke
The strong have conquered us the weak

They castrate us, then cut out our tongue.
Our offspring are cast in the river
they roast those parts from us that they have rung
The rest wait their fate, in fear they weep and shiver

Our broken shields they pound to ploughs
The gold we called our own recast
their king in time becomes renown
and our fate becomes a long forgotten past.

Many centuries hence you'll stand
where once I bled, a testament to life.
Left to whither in the sun, to a last man
we all, staked to suffer a tortuous strife.

The buzzards have gathered to pick our bones
Our flesh has cooked here in the sun
They fight amongst the ruins of our homes
Their boundless feast has just begun.

Is That Not Enough?

There is hollowness in words
Spoken, yet not heard.
The numbness comes by itself
and knows to stay awhile.

We can't seem to go forward.
Are we friends …. just friends?
Not strangers, nor lovers.
We are what we were, of late.

And tomorrow, like all yesterdays
No different, yet much the same.
Will anything change? Probably not!
For we are just friends, is that not enough?

Conceptions as to What Perhaps May Be

With women, as with flowers
Bright pollen bursts from within
Carried by the wind before the tower
That dare cast shadows on our sins.

The secret splendour of a dream
avant tout le monde, garde
ton Coeur! Fear not what somehow seems
take the very easy, not the very hard.

Can our will sit at boundary's reason
Set it not down at life's centre
The wind it changes with each season

Your fragile heart so too will render

What thoughts precede our actions, let's see
Is it joy and happiness we sought
Conceptions as to what perhaps may be
The price we've paid for what we've bought

Set on! Otherwise unhappiness will be your lot
And vulgarity life's certain fixity
The nonsense, reason and myth all got
From Heraclitoris' self-righteous deity.

Par chance, je suis malheureux, et ce n'est
pas votre, ni ma faute, ni celle de la vie.
In seconds, minutes, hours and days
what awaits my lot, we all shall see.

She Had Not Much Yet To Grow

Laura de France, la Lyonesse
She tries to understand her heart,
and find true happiness in what is best
The full pleasure that is the part.

She sits and ponders where does love begin?
In the mind, or in some other place?

She worries about where and when it ends
The kind, the measure and the case.

As she sits a blue butterfly dances by
She plays she paws at the air
Then lets out a misfit sigh.
It floats away. Why should I care?

With her sad eyes she looks around
Alone, surrounded by snivelling cubs
Who stumble the part and whine the sound.
Silly little things she knows to snub.

They are little awkward boys.
Her majesty they understand nought.
All led by their pendant toys.
Flesh and conquest it's all they sought.

Laura, you are our concubine they growl
La Lyonesse she knows what she lacks,
But again they begin to hunt, to prowl
When she rolls unto her back.

The afternoon sun feels good to her
as she lays in the shade of a solitary tree.
Her pride, her warm breast, her soft fur
She wants quiet … oh let me be!

Then a cub, her tail tugs he
She hissed and cried out
How dare you touch me
Then more join in the bout.

They jump on her, they maul
She fought them off as best she can
They paw her belly, then a growl
Things end as fast as they began.

The Master of the Pride arrives.
He struts with majestic step
This, his daughter, his newest bride
He came to claim, and to protect.

Laura sat up and with raised head
Sneered over at the fearful set
Never will I share your common bed
Somewhere else, your pleasure get!

She turns her back and strides away.
She swings her tail to and fro
To bask in the remains of the day,
She had not much yet to grow.

Until

She was a little girl
until her breasts burst forth,
and then began to ...

Rhyme Time

Clip … clop
Flip … Flop
Hip … Hop

Hippy … Dippy
Really … Lippy
Silly … Sally

Hilly … Filly
Filly … Fanny
Billy … Willy

Oh … no
So … Slow
Don’t … go

Kind … smile
Fine … guile

Mine … awhile

Clop… Clip
Flop … Flip
Hop … Hip

Dippy … Hippy
Lippy … Really
Sally … Silly

Filly … Hilly
Fanny … Filly
Willy … Billy

No … oh
Slow … so
Go … don’t

Smile … kind
Guile … fine
Awhile … mine.

Where Does Lost Time Go

Where does lost time go
at the end of each day?

Ask! No one can honestly say
‘cause no one truly knows.

Alas, do the soft clouds
ever lay down their tired heads?
Well … where are their beds
as they drift all around.

And the poor, gentle wind
whispers back, sadly apart
sharing secrets of the heart
as it gathers up our sins.

When the sun banes to sets
Upon the distant waters
Can we see the sea boil
and hear the oceans’ hiss?

After evening’s sunset
the stars they do appear here
silently coy as if this were
the first time they have met.

When our daily toil is ended
and we are robbed of lust
are we then crumbled dust …
are our frail sense offended?

Alas, when the sun again
appears afresh in the morn
Are all our dreams forsworn?
The hard night did pass in vain?

When from our sleep we do rise
with the dark passage of time
More words, that together do rhyme
Sweep across our furrowed minds.

Ask me where lost time goes
One instant it is here
And then next it is there
Don't ask … no one knows.

I Know Not Beauty, I Know Not Sin

All that eyes
    Do seek
All that hearts
    Do find
All this is inside
    My troubled mind.

Enter my hope

All is well
Enter my fear
I cannot tell
Enter my illusions
All is hell.

On time
In faith
On hope
In pain
On that all
Is the same.

We know
Things different
We find
We are mislaid
All is lost
I do not care.

I know not
… beauty
I know not
… sin
I only know
What is within.

She Creates Her Own Harness

His world is his needle
Everything that he is
exists in his small pen
that pierces through her flesh

She can't see how he got in
She can't find her way out
She is captured, then tied down
forced against her will … out of her mind.

Once he is in, he is in.
Her world shrinks to nothing
She hides her agony well
He has her hunger and her thirst.

Her's is a cry of desperation
A hope for her chance
He pumps into her
oblivious of her pain.

When it has become inevitable
he tires. Rest will soon be at hand.
He is blinded by his banner

She, well hidden by her shame.

Then she wakes, then she shakes.
her dream has left her wet.
She creates her own harness.
A fantasy to escape her lonely life.

One Can Find Summer's Happiness

Amongst the warmth and light of an August afternoon
Amongst the clouds and raindrops too
Even in a world so much at odds and ends
One can find summer's happiness.

It is the gleam of sunlight on the ocean
Reflecting off the hair of a strawberry beauty
Who has shared, an afternoon delight with me
And I so unprepared for things … things best left unsaid

Summer bliss, of memories and desires
Of gracefulness, that floats by overhead
Castles – a Princess' realm, blown by
immeasurable peace and newfound worlds

That sensation of floating, heralded by perfume
The essence of hidden flowers … of pink butterflies

Oh in such an Auguste place
One can find summer’s happiness.

That Rush to Never Land

Who lives in separate
worlds, one real
The other imagined
In the dark

In the dark
You can never be alone
There is always us
and our thoughts too

There is anguish
In the dark
Still to escape the pain
there is pleasure too

Taking matters at hand
there is that little death
In the dark
that rush to never land

Towards Uncharted Shores

She made me wonder about
her secret collections of things
dainty, pink and orange lace
that fit her mood or place

Her Bikini Atoll … flowered
like loud Hawaiian shirts
Then one day she wore
a flowing purple skirt

She set sail from Maui
towards fabled shores
bright flowers and petals
billowing, fragrant in the breeze

She knew her hold,
then it dawned on me …
the feeling of knowing
yet setting away with it

This gave me a pleasure
I never thought possible
She knew that too
… the pleasure that is

The languid sailing
Waves like white elephants
afloat at our small table
amongst the coffee set

We sailed away together
Around the sugar cubes
and spoiled spoons
the empty cups too.

We have spirited Venus
to pilot us towards
uncharted shores
as happy as we are.

She Did Not Want

She did not want
to grow up,
to know love and sex,
and beget children ...

Oh Well – They Are Enough

Admittedly, they are quite small

Twin curiosities at best
deceptions that belie their age
the true, the time … the test

I am not scared of them
But are they scared of me?
They sometimes poke or peak
then hide away you see.

They intrigue, these chirlish twos
that never grew, mere hills
short shrift, perhaps beneath the bill
but then again … so what

With time, they'll remain the same
when other mighty mountains slough
if ever needed they'll grow again
As such – oh well – they are enough.

The Key Cannot Unlock You

It's the pull
The measure of all things

You can't escape it
it's always there

Just when you think
You are alone

It bobs its head
to says I’m here

But you are there
at an unfair distance

The key cannot
unlock you

It jangles
on its chain

It’s the pull
its here again.

Trials Worthy of an English Gentleman

We are told the only two
trials worthy of an English
Gentleman are poetry and war
In life there’s not much more.

But I think we may perhaps
Leave out the act of making
War and try enough instead
The act of lust and love.

This brings more sparkle
To the eyes. It boils the
Blood in a much nicer way
than anger of fear ever may.

The more the passion so much so
mild mannered and inconspicuous
behind the reserve of it all
both gentle and a man.

What was it that Hemingway
Once said? If you are a writer you
Write, and if you are good at it
You write about things you know.

Then can you walk down
the boulevard of life without a care
and live by mere words ‘till
all that’s right’s laid bare.

It’s hard writing, but it’s an easy read
Sort of like life, prose in

So many syllables, but
Always the same in the end.

If life were no more simpler than
We are born, grow up.
Grow old, dénoument
Then period …. end of sentence.

Worked Upon by Words

When it comes to words,
are we merely content
to sit and read, to
surrender and drift away

To be taken, wherever
the prose flows
as captives to other's
streams of thought

To be enchanted
cast upon by incantations
Tom tomed by the primitive
rhythms of the invisible

Worked upon by words

inked by others. The
loneliness of it all it all.
The tilt of prose, it’s tall.

Atta girl, Smash the Glass … Would You Believe It

Help me I am caught
between the soft covers
of this silly book into which
I’ve fallen but can’t climb out.

The scribe she wanted not
just money, nor mere fame.
She wanted to put the world
to tear and shame

Now she’s trapped me
by her illogic of it all
her angry trite sentiment
and weeping wounded loneliness

She’s really not abroad
but narrow like her books.
She’s an organ grinder
on her wooden post

And her explanations, are beyond
imagination, they're divagination
Sis, everyone has their own troubles
Life's more than just worries and fears

Why should we just scrape
through and let bewilderment
set the measure of all things
words, words, words. The pen is pest.

If it's not the destination
then it is the journey
And I am wanted on
this voyage, really I am

Is it your rage then
that makes your vision
blur, or just bad
Insight. The picture's clear.

She would claim of men
that there is only enough
blood to either think
or f**k, but not both.

And abreast of all
this the other 'men

they bleed wisdom
the more the merrier

But she, well she's birthed
A lulu, the monster's in
the mirror, from you to us
She babbles and mocks

Atta girl, smash the glass
Would you believe it?
In her measure of things
Everything is below the belt.

Plain and Simple

How is it you can
come and just loathe
people, plain people
and in particular
their simple pleasures
more than anything
else, how come?
How is it you
Would rather be
lonely then happy
with someone else?

There are things
that can cause us
harm outside. You
wrap yourself in
warm blankets
happy to shield
against the storm
and cold, but its
just rough wool
plain and simple
so life’s tough
Is it better to
live a truth, or
lie an ignorance.

She Spread Her Legs

But she said
she loved him
and he said ...
he loved her
as well ... so ...
she spread
her legs wide ...
and he came
for her.

PROSE

My First Crush

My neighbour was a girl my age and fun to play with. We shared an interest in picture books. I remember her pleasant smile and her giggle, and her blue eyes and her curly red hair. We could not wait to enter first grade.

But sadly she would not make it. One day she went away to the hospital. When she came home I knew something was wrong. But neither she nor her parents would say what. My once energetic and happy friend now had neither energy nor happiness.

One day I snuck over to see her. She was asleep. I thought my prized teddy bear would bring her good luck and tucked it into bed beside her. She took it with her to the hospital. She never came home.

The time between her diagnosis and her demise was eight months. It was a childhood leukemia that took her.

Her parents, on their return from the hospital were overcome with grief. They asked me if I wanted my teddy bear back. I said no. I wanted her to have it, to play with it in heaven.

She was buried with my teddy bear.

Pique magazine – ***My First Crush*** competition. February 2017

A Touch of Sweden

I love the Swedes and I know they love Canadians. The two countries have much in common, beyond similar geography. I have been to Sweden only once in my life on a business trip to conclude a successful cooperative agreement with an established Swedish technology company. They were rebuilding their market presence after a few lean years. This was about twenty years ago.

Frankly, I doubt much has changed in Stockholm over the past two decades, and if that were true for me that would be charming. I would love to go back to Sweden and Stockholm in particular a few more times before I die and explore the culture and character of Sweden and its people.

And who wouldn't, given the rather personal introduction to some of the beauties of the country. It was on the very afternoon of my arrival that I began to appreciate the rather unique nature of the Swedes.

I seem to recall that the Stockholm International Airport had only one lane entering it and only one lane leaving it. Here in Vancouver there is a multilane raceway to and from the international airport. Everyone seems to be in a hurry here in Canada compared to the Swedes. The Swedes have a fun-loving and leisurely nature to them. I found this out that very afternoon.

The taxi drive to our hotel was pleasant for me but less though for my wife, who had accompanied me on this trip and was tired and bothered by our long trip on a Lufthansa 747. We had traveled sardine class, deep within the

bowels of the plane. The food was unpleasant, as were the passengers. The trip was trying, as was her company. I was midway through my one and only marriage at the time and my wife was traveling with me on our one and only international trip together. We hadn't had much of a honeymoon because we were not all that wealthy. Both the trip and my nuptials were, to say the least, a trying experience.

It is said that if you really want to get to know someone, don't move in with them, or even share a bed. Take a long trip with them instead.

This trip was the only long and arduous trip for us both. And in a real sense it was the beginning of the end of our marriage. Perhaps it was just an inevitability given how different our two temperaments were. Perhaps it was the contrast between three fun-loving and beautiful Swedish women I encountered, and the severe and taciturn behavior of my wife.

At this point I guess I should tell you I have been divorced for about ten years. The beginning of the end of our marriage was the bitter aftertaste of this one and only long trip we took together. I had hoped for a family; but upon our return and at my insistence my wife finally admitted she was infertile and had known this since before we were married. But not being truthful she had kept this from me.

One does not live for oneself in marriage, one lives with the hope that children will one day fill your home with joy and happiness. My twelve years of married life, from age thirty one onwards, were joyless and unhappy ones. I do not have children, but for no lack of trying. And I really don't

miss married life, although I do occasionally miss its intimacy. I sleep alone and have for over a decade. How empty my life was, became apparent after my trip to Stockholm.

When we arrived on a Wednesday morning at our hotel at the centre of Stockholm I found the surroundings calm and inviting. We had travelled for nearly a day to get there. I knew to sleep on the plane, but my ex was not use to the world, or being around strangers and so she had not slept at all, and was perhaps annoyed that I had survived our travails well, while she was exhausted.

I had to be pragmatic because I was there for business. She didn't for she was there for a vacation. In some sense this reflected the imbalance in our points of view. I worked hard and she, well, she did not work but took selfish advantage of my generosity and commitment. This started to become obvious to me because of the three fun-loving and beautiful Swedish women I encountered in Stockholm. The trip home from Stockholm was a somber one for me.

I don't remember the name of the hotel but it was quite modern and pleasant. It was the middle of the morning in Stockholm when we arrived but I was not tired. Sadly all my travel companion wanted to do was get to our room so that she could lay down. She was always saying she had a headache, especially if she had to exert herself.

I smile as I write this because she had all but invited herself on this business trip and it would be she that would take the next few days shopping up a

storm and using up our scant travel funds. I was there to meet with colleagues from a Swedish firm that I was working with on a joint business venture. We would later that year win an important contract to provide a nuclear medicine cyclotron to a preeminent New York cancer treatment centre at the new Rockefeller Hospital. This would be the beginning of a very successful run for the company I worked for at the time. My work would be pivotal to their success.

Our trip together to Stockholm was meant to bring us closer together but in fact it did the complete opposite. My wife's family was of Northern European heritage and so she figured that I could not go on this trip without taking her along, and so she invited herself, which complicated my business trip in so many ways. After our few days in Stockholm we would take an overnight ferry to Helsinki. It was mid-summer's and well, we ended up being booked on a 'booze cruise' with our cabin above the very loud stage where rather thunderous and rambunctious music was played all night. And you can guess who chose that cabin. Being an old naval officer I had wanted a cabin with a porthole. But, hell that's a story for another day.

Once she had comfortably settled into our room at the hotel, all I wanted was a nice, relaxing swim. I also needed some quiet time to myself. And so having tucked her into the soft and placid bed, under a warm and inviting down fill, I gathered my swim suit and made my way to the basement of the hotel where there was a small pool, a hot tub and a sauna. Well actually there are two saunas, one for the men and one for the women, but I will get to that in a moment.

As I exited the elevator what struck me as odd was the long and narrow window that adorned the wall of the woman's change room. It was at eye height and let people in the hallway see into the woman's change room. This was unusual and there was no such window in the men's change room. The pool area was vacant and peacefully quiet. I went into the men's changing room, content that there would be modest privacy. I had the place to myself, changed and was in the pool in the matter of a perhaps a minute or two.

For perhaps twenty minutes I had the place to myself. I just floated about helping my back to relax (I have chronic and painful back and neck problems which had ended my naval career). Since I wear glasses, I had left them in my locker. The light reflected off the surface of the water and made pretty, undulating patterns on the ceiling. There was soft classical music serenading me as I languished in the cool and delicious water.

After my swim I decided not to take either a dip in the hot tub (I am not a hot tub kind of a person, thinking they are a germ factory more than anything else). Nor did I decide to take a few minutes in the Swedish sauna in the men's change room.

Instead I went directly into the shower and then to change to return to my room. I thought I might take my time returning to my room, thinking I might stop to visit the lobby and the restaurant to check on the menu, and even the gift and news shop. I was not in a hurry to wake my taciturn wife.

It was while I had my back to the door and was drying myself with my towel that the door swung open. But I didn't think anything of it, being in the men's change room. And so I continued on to dry my hair, not taking any note of what was going on behind me.

Then a woman's voice broke the silence, asking something in Swedish.

I responded quite startled with "I think you are in the wrong change room," my back still turned to the voice.

"American?" she asked.

"No Canadian …" and I once again repeated "I think you are in the wrong change room." Something was said in Swedish and then there were giggles. I figured now that three woman were behind me as I stood with a bare behind. I dropped my towel from my hair and wrapped it around my mid-rift. I slowly turned but didn't have my glasses on so all I saw was the blurred image of three women in diminishing attire as they got themselves ready to go for a swim

The same voice asked "where you from, Toronto, Montreal?"

"Vancouver," I replied. There was some more Swedish spoken. I started to put my glasses on, and was astonished by what I saw. There were three pretty women in their mid-twenties, pretty bare to the skin. One was brunette, one red head and one blonde. From where I stood and what I had seen I can attest to the fact that there hair colours were very real and very

natural. I turned around out of modesty and could feel my face burn with a blush.

“Is something wrong?” the talkative one asked.

“I am just going to get dressed and leave.” I reached for my clothes even though I was not entirely dry and was about to dress when I felt the talkative one standing next to me.

“Why are you in a hurry to leave?”. She almost cooed as she said this. “We don’t mind company.” I looked up at her. It was the blonde one. She had emerald blue eyes and was perhaps 170 cm tall. She was very slim and athletic and showed no modesty whatsoever.

“I am married.” I lifted my ring finger to show her.

“So,” was her reply. One of the other women asked something in Swedish and the blonde responded. Then there was a giggle, and the red head said something.

I looked up but didn’t need to ask for the blonde one knew I was curious.

“She said, why should that matter?” She smiled with such a convincing smile that I barely felt the tug on my towel, and then it sort of fell with a will of its own. She stood next to me, as I to her, in an immodest and rather intimate state. She leaned over and her bare hip touched my bare hip. The effect was electric and I sensed goose bumps all over my body.

"We are going into the sauna." The other two women were already entering the sauna, and in a moment I was all along with the talkative one. "Come and join us."

"My wife is up stairs sleeping," I responded.

"So let her sleep." I looked up into her eyes and sensed a softness that was trusting and comforting to me, so I set my clothes back onto the peg in the locker.

"That's better."

I closed the locker door and turned to her modestly, covering myself with my hands. "Do you treat all strangers this way?"

"No, only Canadians." She had her hands on her hips. "If you were European or American, we would ignore you, but I like Canadians. I once had a Canadian boyfriend. He was from Montreal and quite a lover."

"But, I am not from Montreal …" I sputtered. She had me off balanced and given the way she stood before me, she had me at a great disadvantage.

"Besides, my friends have never met a Canadian. Are all Canadians great lovers?"

I smiled coyly. How can one answer such a question? I shrugged my shoulders and she giggle.

“Are you staying at the hotel,” I asked her.

She nodded. “We are here for a few days. My friend is getting married.”

“Which one?”

She smiled. “Marta.”

“Which one is Marta?”

“The Brunette. I have organized her pre-wedding party … what do you call them in English … Bachl…”

“A bachelorette.” I smiled.

“That’s it, a bachelorette.”

The fact they were together for a bachelorette party meant they could indulge their appetites without guilt, so I let my hands drop. As I stood there talking with her I sensed her casualness. She was not staring at me, nor me at her, although we both had the bests of us now in plain view.

A courage and curiosity came over me and so I smiled and extended her my hand. “My name is Patrick.”

“She extended me her hand and we shook politely. “My name is Inga.” She had a careful handshake and her eyes stayed on mine the whole time we shaked hands. As we shook the best of me jiggled as did her bosom.

She giggled. “Please stay. Marta would enjoy the company.”

“Only Marta?” Two could play that game. I gave her a furtive glance.

“Well, me too.” In this Inga was being honest for her nipples were beginning to bloom and the tiny dimples that surrounded them as well.

I admired the beauty and form of Inga for a second or two then asked “Was it Marta who suggested you sneak in here.”

Inga nodded and smiled ruefully. Somehow this seemed to make sense. It was a bachelorette’s prerogative, which would be shared with her closest friends.

It was at that point I made a fitful decision. I would let my wife sleep longer. “I will stay if only for only a few minutes.” She smiled and turned and walked to the sauna. I could tell Inga was athletic for there was not an ounce of fat on her. I followed Inga into the sauna.

The two other women were already reclining languidly on the upper bench. They were very happy to see me. The hot air triggered a coughing fit. I

nearly chocked as I entered and took refuge on the lower bench. They had poured water over the coals and the air was very hot.

I continued to cough for the next few seconds. The three women studied me anxiously. I felt very vulnerable. In the past I have had bad bouts of asthma. I did the best I could to settle the coughing for who would want to leave such wonderful company. I took perhaps a half minute for the coughing to abate.

"Are you ok?" Inga asked.

"I am not use to Swedish saunas. It's too hot for me."

"Let me introduce you to my two friends." Inga spoke to her two friends and Marta leaned forward extended her hand to me. I took her hand but did not shake it much for her bosom hung before me and I did not want to create any high drama.

"I hear you are getting married," I said. Inga translated and Marta nodded her head, causing her bosom to swing in unison. I tried not to notice and smiled. She smiled back in a knowing and toying fashion. Oh well. So much for avoiding high drama.

Next the red head woman extended her hand to me and I shook it as well. She covered her breasts as we made our introductions. Her name was Clara. She was half-breasted in a sort of juvenile way. She was the youngest of the three by a good five years. And she was shy. She held her other hand across

her breasts and curled up in such a fashion that her femininity was well tucked away from view. This was charming and endearing to me. Perhaps she had noticed what had happened to Marta when we had shook hands and was self-conscious.

As I stood before the three of them I was self-conscious and hide the best of me as best as I could from their view, without being too obvious.

Then Marta climbed past me onto the high bench, brushing her hip against mine. I made my way to the lowest of three benches, near the door and opposite the stove. The room was big enough for maybe six people, provided they don't all lie back. Clara was nearest to stove, leaning forward on the bench with her arms now set to either side of her. She was directly opposite from me. Marta was inclined against the wall next to her. And Inga was laying down on the next bench down with her feet nearest the stove.

And there I was, the man sitting on the lowest bench, looking up at three beautiful women. We started to chat with Inga translating. Marta was twenty four, Clara twenty and Marta, twenty six. The three had gone to university together and none were married, yet.

Clara asked a question in Swedish. "How old are you?"

I smiled but did not immediately answer. I looked at their eyes and saw their anxious interest. And so I answered. "Thirty six."

There was a bit of Swedish from Clara. Inga translated. "You look a lot younger. More like twenty six." I smiled at Clara and winked, and she smiled back.

Another question, this time from Marta, but I preempted by saying "… six years. That's how long I have been married." I started to sit back on the bench and was still self-conscious and so I leaned back with one knee covering the best of me. Of all the three in the room only Clara opposite me was afforded a bit of a view of my masculinity. She sensed my uneasiness and so she lowered her eyes.

"How did you know what Marta was going to ask?" Inga inquired.

"I just figured that would be the next things asked, since she is the one getting married … and no …"

"No what …" Inga asked

"No children." I frowned. They noticed the frown.

Inga translated. There was a subdued murmur of sorts.

Inga looked at me with a strange expression. "Why no children?"

I waited a moment before trying to answer. It was an uncomfortable question, and one I had asked myself several times. Perhaps they understand

the expression on my face. I decided to not answer the question but stating an obvious. “It’s not as if we haven’t been trying.”

My response was translated. Inga turned to me with a big smile. “Marta says you should try harder.

I felt oddly offended by this comment and so I through modesty aside and let my knee drop. The best of me was now in plain view. And I was challenged. My sword was unsheathed, fit the fight. But where was its scabbard?

Clara leaned forward hoping to catch a peek of me and said something. Another giggle ensued.

I looked at Inga and asked “What did she say?”

“She says you are beautiful.”

“Thanks, and so are the three of you.” I responded. I put some music into my phrase for emphasis.

Marta said something and Inga translated.

“Is your wife is here?”

I nodded and pointed upwards. “She is asleep in our room. We just flew in from Vancouver.”

I looked up at Marta and asked. "When is your wedding?"

Inga responded, "on Sunday afternoon." That was just five days hence.

I looked up at Marta and queried "do you know what you are getting into?" Inga translated and Marta said something in return. Inga said something to Marta and Marta made a movement with her hand at me.

Inga stole a look back at Marta then spoke. "Yes she does."

I suddenly felt awkward. I sensed I had touched a raw nerve. "I did not mean to pry." Inga translated and Marta spoke again, this time more softly.

There was a few seconds of silence then Inga broke the silence. "She is three months expecting …and she has told the father they will be married for their child's sake."

I looked up at Marta and now understood her ample bosom. Then, as if to make things more apparent she thrust her belly forward and I think I could just make out a small baby bump. Or maybe it was the dim lighting of the sauna.

"Tell Marta she is very beautiful."

Inga translated my remark and Marta took her hand to her face, with a show of emotion. Marta than said something which Inga immediately translated with gusto. As she translated Clara gave Marta a big hug.

"She thanks you for being so kind. Everyone thinks she is fat." I would have to admit that she was the most Rubenesque of the three, but she was also the tallest of the three by perhaps a good five centimeters. Her breasts were that of a woman whose body was responding to her pregnancy.

I looked up at the three woman. There were each different from the others. They were talking among themselves, almost ignoring that I was there, an interloper and the only man. As they moved I could make out more of their femininity. Now that everyone had been introduced they hardly seem to care that I was there, even Clara, who now was no longer so self-conscious. She had let her hands drop from her breasts and had them on her knees.

I thought to myself, what kind of lovers would they each make. Almost as if they could read my mind, each in their turn gave me a furtive glance and were probably wondering the same thing about me. I began to stir and they noticed this.

I started to stand. "I think it is time for me to go."

The three of them became animate, "No please stay." Inga was the spokesman.

“I wish I could … It is not so often that I can find myself in such beautiful company.”

Inga translated and before I could react the three woman had stood and were now upon me. There were Sirens to poor Homer. But Homer had to sail on.

I smiled and then offered my hands to each of them. No longer did either group feel the need to be modest. Perhaps this was the Swedish way of making friends. We made our a dieus. Or so I thought.

I stepped out of the sauna alone and made my way across the change room to the showers. I turned on the water and began to wash myself with some soap. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned ever so slightly and saw the beaming face of Marta. She pointed at the soap and I handed it to her. She placed one hand on my shoulder and held the soap in the other. Then she did the unexpected. She began to wash my back. It was luscious.

Marta’s strokes across my back were firm and gentle at the same time. She took her time, scrubbing my back in round circles that got smaller and smaller as she got to the base of my spine. Marta’s caress triggered an electric feeling that radiated out in all directions. She then passed warm water on my back to wash the soap off my back.

Then she motioned with her hand that I turn around. I smiled and shook my head. It was I who now pointed to the soap. Marta understood. She handed me the soap and turned around.

It was my turn to wash her back. I admired the majesty of her for a second or two then I set to work. She was beautiful. I reached out and touched her back with my hand. Then I reached out and touched her shoulder as well. Her skin was soft. I looked at her. My god I looked at her. I could see her muscles, and bones beneath her skin. Marta had a straight spine and an hour glass figure. Her hair hung down over her shoulders. I lifted her hair and before I set the soap to her skin after I had gently kissed her neck. It seemed like the thing to do to kiss her on the nape of her neck. It was a way to pay homage to her beauty. You could see the goose bumps rise and I swear Marta shuddered.

I leaned forward. She wore small pearl ear rings. This said a great deal about her – simple elegance. I whispered in Marta's ear "you are so beautiful." She turned ever so slowly to look at me. For a moment I saw in her Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring, but Vermeer could not have painted such a majestic painting. I could tell she understood what I was saying for her eyes had teared up. As I looked past her shoulder I saw the most magnificent sight any man could ever hope to see, the fullest of her bosom, with her arousal in full bloom. Without looking away I slowly started to wash her back and watched with a mesmerized air the rocking back and forth of her resplendent breasts.

I could feel myself come alive. Marta leaned over to kiss my cheek, looked down and noticed this and smiled. . I looked at her lips then at her eyes. They beckoned me to lean forward and kiss her. But I couldn't. I felt both embarrassed and bemuddled. Nothing remotely resembling this moment had ever happened to me before. But Marta would not be disappointed. She

leaned forward and kissed me. As she leaned forward inertia took hold of her. Her resplendent breasts went sploosh against me. It was undulating glory. We both giggled nervously.

She wanted to kiss me again, but I lifted my hand and placed a finger on her lips, and shook my head. Once was enough. She frowned. I lifted my free hand and stroked her cheek. Then I lifted my hand holding the soap.

Marta lifted her hands to her bosom and cradled her breasts in her hands. She slowly turned around again and I continued to soap and wash her back, with a soft determination of a mortal touching an angel for the one and only time in eternity. Time felt like it stood still. Even above the soft patter of the shower I could make out the erotic and perfumed breath of Marta.

We were both in heaven. I wished this moment in my life could last forever.

I moved my hand slowly down her back. Here was a woman who would soon be a mother and I envied her for this. She would bring life into this world, something that I could never do. I think she was reading my thoughts for her body was becoming warmer and warmer and warmer to my touch. Marta was glowing with her inner light.

I slowly and lovingly washed her lower back, caressing that small v at the base of her spine and then for added measure I knelt and I washed her backside as well. Then she turned and there I was, looking up to her, paying homage to the mightiest Venus that I ever met. Hidden behind a tuft of hair the secret mystery of her was there for my eyes to admire as well as the

passage way that her child would at term take into this world. It was a crimson smile that made a mockery of the lips I had just of late kissed. The secret mystery of her pursed, drawing me forward. Her pheromones were intoxicating. But I would be too bold to pursue her and kiss her there. It was too intimate and I did not know her well enough to be so intimate.

Marta leaned forward enticingly and so I kissed her just below her belly button, where I imagined her uterus was and where her baby was growing within her. I could feel my chin touch her most sensitive button, that little boy of her, the throb of which I unmistakably felt. My kiss on her belly and the touch of my skin against her sensitivity set loose a shudder with a deepness that would shake awake the little child within her and tell that child that love and life beckons.

She looked down at me with an appetite that begged of touch. With her hand behind my head she pressed me forward and motioned that she wanted me to kiss the best of her. But instead I kissed her stomach again with such tenderness and desire. Then with my left hand I took her right hand and guided it to her femininity and took her index finger and guided it to her cradle. Marta began to caress herself. Then she began to rub herself vigorously. It fascinated me to watch her. I smiled up at her.

Marta had closed her eyes and was deep within her bliss. As I watched, slowly she began to climb onto her toes, her fingers lifting herself up as if the entire of her was poised and dancing on her fingertips. I thought she might topple over and so a reached up and cradled her in my hands. When she felt my hands her ardor became more pronounced.

Here before me was the incredible majesty of womanhood. This was passion that I as a man could never hope to give her, a woman. Marta caressed and caressed and caressed. Then she shuddered and then she came.

And my god did Marta come. A woman who is expecting is awash with hormones. It is such tenderness that can set off a pregnant woman's desires like a fuse can set off a powerful stick of dynamite. Marta exploded with a gush of desire. It was dynamite, for both of us. She opened her eyes and beamed at me. Her breathing was deep and arduous. To this day I have yet to come upon a woman who responded with such ardor and passion to my love. Then she slowly stepped off her toes and leaned back against the wall.

There we were the two of us. The shower water was drumming on my head and time stood still. I wrapped my arms around her and hugged her. She passed her hands through my hair, as I admired the best of her and thought of her and her child and the beauty of life. I think we both wished that time would stop and freeze us in our pose, as figures on an ancient Greek urn worthy of poetic remembrances. Her passions abated with fitful shudder and then she was still. Then Marta sighed contentedly. She slowly lifted me up.

Languidly I rose admiring the bountiful beauty of her. She guided me close to her body. When I stood before her, the best of me tickled the best of her. But I, being a gentleman did not beset upon her, for she was with child and betrothed.

I peered into her eyes. Her eyes were kind and gently. They were somewhat out of focus and she took a moment before she could see me clearly. I kissed her on her cheek and she kissed me on my lips. Then she set me free from her hug. I could tell that she knew it was time for me to go. I had shared with her a bachelorette gift which she never forget, nor never regret, save in the parting.

She looked past me. I turned around and leaned against the wall beside her. I saw that both Inga and Clara were watching us. I wondered how long they had been watching us. That was answered in the fullest of their smiles and the firmness of their nipples. Yes, they had been watching for some time and yes they were envious. But I could not stay.

And so, as Marta took one last touch of my hand, I walked away from her. I marched by the two envious ones without saying a thing. Inga smiled and Clara reached over to me, lightly touching my arm as I walked past her. Then they both raced to pay homage to Marta.

I quickly got dressed and was about to leave the room when Inga came to me and spoke. "Will you come later?"

Well, given what had just transpired I could not very well just pass by the opportunity to tease her with a play in words … "Come again?"

"Will you be down later?" I was unsure whether she understood the entendre.

“For a swim?” I parried.

“Of course … for a swim.” There was pleading in her voice.

“Maybe after dinner …” I spoke honestly because I did not want to give her false hope nor make promises I might not be able to keep.

Inga looked at me and I could see an appetite in her eyes.

I made a decision. “If I can I will come just before I go to sleep tonight.” I tried to sound convincing. “But there was no way of knowing whether that would be possible... “

She smiled at me with a toothy smile, like a predator admiring prey. A shiver ran down my spine. “We are in room 402 … you can come and knock on our door to get us …”

I walked to the door of the change room and turned. I gave Inga a solemn nod. Just as I stepped out of the change room the two other women appeared from the shower room. They gleamed like statues in the light of the surroundings. Inga nodded at them and all three turned to me and waved. I blew them three kisses and departed. Marta waved back at me and I waved back at her. She looked so happy!

As the door closed behind me I heard the happiness of the three woman fill the room they now had all to themselves.

At the elevator I leaned my head against the brass door looking down at my muted reflection. I could feel my heart was pounding against my rib cage. Perhaps it was the endorphins and the adrenaline. I pressed the button to summon the elevator, then looked at my watch. I had been swimming for just over an hour. But what an hour! I closed my eyes and remembered the sight, the sounds, the taste and the touch. My heart started to pound ever more tenaciously. Then there was a bing and I had just enough time to lift my head from the door before it opened. I noticed my forehead had left the shape of a heart on the brass finish of the door. Was it so evident?

Thankfully the elevator was empty. As I stood there I felt so sad and alone.

I glanced back down the hallway and with reluctance stepped into the elevator. My hand shook as I pressed the sixth floor button. Oh if only I could stay!

Bathtub Concubine

{Excerpt from A Model Life}

I woke up that Friday morning quite early with an ominous feeling that something terrible was going to happen. But, to be perfectly honest that feeling seemed some distance from me. It did not seem to be anchored in my providence, but in the destiny of another.

I fought the urge to remain in bed and call that day a sick day. I had an early morning class I needed to attend, and then there was the matter of the math class, which I didn't need or even want to attend. That was another matter. Since I was informally auditing the math class, it was different than taking a class for credit for which I would have to write a final exam. I had done all the assignments in the math class and had done quite well, but I had been assessing my own work, not the professor. The Prof was an affable type, but very strict in his math – he had a sort of Jeckle and Hyde personality.

I tried to roll over and go back asleep, but I could never do that on a weekday only on Sundays, and today was not a Sunday. I looked outside. The sun was rising above the hill tops and the sky was lightening up. This day had broken. There was a slight drizzle outside, another day of Scottish mist. What was strange is that you could barely see any clouds. Even the sky could not decide one way or the other.

With a mere few weeks left before my a final exams, I rolled out of bed at an unusual time of 0545 and reluctantly set myself on the path for whatever lay waiting for me that day. I usual stayed in bed until 0630.

The commute out to the university was anticlimactic. My morning class also passed uneventful. And in the middle of the morning I ventured to see the math prof of the class I was informally auditing and met with him in his office. Professor H. was teaching statistics. He was married, whether happily or nought one could only speculate had two teen age children – a son and a daughter – was approachable and affable to a degree, and almost always absorbed in his mathematics.

He was curious as to why I had not been to the last two classes. "We had covered some interesting math" he said. I explained to him that for the final few weeks of the term I had some catching up to do with some of my other classes and asked him if I could just drop by periodically to pick up class notes from him. He was a meticulous thinker and always arrived with his lecture notes in hand.

Professor H. was most accommodating; with the proviso I keep the notes to myself. He didn't want them to circulate for this would mean other students 'would skip' (his words) He said he would have the notes ready for me by Monday and invited me to come by then. Now that this matter having been settled, I decided to remain on campus to study for a few hours but felt it best to hide myself in the stacks of the main library lest Lauren come searching for me. I did not know her that well but in the back of my mind I somehow knew she would seek me out.

But me seeking refuge in the stacks of the main library would prove to be to no avails. It was about twenty minutes after the nominal end of the afternoon math class that I sensed the ominous feeling rise in me again. I was sitting at one of the large oak tables in the physical sciences section of the stacks and did not look up from my quantum physics when she approached me from my blind side. Before I knew she was upon me, standing behind me looking down. Lauren had trapped me with her physical presence.

I looked up. She looked down at me, hands on her hips, scowling. I still didn't say anything, wanting her to break the silence. I think she was waiting for me to say something, as if I owed her an explanation or an apology.

Then she broke the silence, like the shatter of a pane of glass. "Where have you been? I have been looking all over for you!"

I smiled and lifting my index finger to my lips and said "shhhh." Then I pointed to the sign that said that students are to study quietly. "We are in the library."

Lauren looked at the sign, and then back at me. "Don't you shush me!" A shiver went down my spine. Well, that about set the temperature – ice cold. It wasn't a pane of glass she had shattered but a sheet of ice.

“So … no one is listening.” Almost on queue a head of another student poked up from behind a carrel partition when I had hissed “shhhh.” I bet she had been listening in. It was then that I thought I might have some fun with Lauren.

“I have been studying for my finals.” I said this loud enough for the woman in the carrel to hear, but not loud enough to distract her. I was hoping she, as an interested third party, was listening in. She looked further up over the divider but her expression was more curiosity than concern.

Lauren hadn’t seen her like I had. She pressed on. “Why haven’t you been coming to math class?” she queried.

I answered truthfully, “I am just auditing the course. I don’t need the credit.” Probability and statistics, as well as the enigmatic probability distribution functions were something I needed to learn to master my quantum physics. For emphasis I pointed down to the Schrödinger equations I was working on. It was a question about the Dirac Delta function potential. I smiled.

Lauren glanced down at my work almost as if she didn’t trust my explanation.

“Look I have found a novel way to solve the equation using integral transforms.” I would later write this technique up and have it published.

Still Lauren wasn’t convinced. Her eyes bore into me.

“I think I can reformulate all of quantum mechanics in terms of transform theory.”

The other women looked over the divider again but this time she had a quizzical expression. Onward I went.

“Why are you avoiding me?” With an icy edge to the question, Lauren continued her interrogation.

“Am I avoiding you?” I tried to warm the conversation up a minute amount. No use playing this drama out too quickly. It is obvious I was avoiding her, but I did not want to admit that, or at least not too readily.

“You skipped math class on Wednesday and today, and you didn’t come to the drawing session on Wednesday.” Her scolding indicated that the missed drawing class was the real annoyance. I meekly smiled and waited for her to continue.

“Did you do a drawing session with Glynis?”

She must have found out from Glynis. I could see Glynis letting that cat out of its bag with a big meow. Glynis probably wanted me all to herself, but in a way entirely different than Lauren. Glynis was a fine artist and had work set before her. In Lauren’s eyes I was just someone on which she wanted to work her art. “Yes.” I nodded for emphasis.

“What! you bastard.” I did not respond to her taunt. My admission took the wind out of her sails, at least for a few minutes. She could have stormed away at that point and leave everything hanging, but I guess she had more on her mind.

Lauren noisily dragged a chair back from the table and plunked herself down opposite me. The carrel with the third party was now over her right shoulder. I could see the women once again curiously looking on. I ignored her and continued.

“Yes, I sat for her and she paid me. She paid me well. You see … you see, I need the money.” I did not even try to be convincing. My words just came out.

“Where did you model for her? It wasn’t at the studio.”

“No it wasn’t.” I stated the obvious, because there was nothing to be gained by lying. There was more to be gained by telling the truth. I had also learned from watching old Perry Mason reruns that you always hide the unknown behind the known, and the more knowns the better. Make the other side work for it.

Obviously last Wednesday after class Lauren had gone back to the studio looking for me when I did not show up for math class. She might even have drifted over to the Bus Stop café but I avoided that eatery for the rest of last week. I didn’t want to be bush wacked by her in public. I could see her throwing a scene.

As I sat there, somewhat dejected by her, Lauren just glared at me. And glared and glared. I finally admitted a small measure of defeat and put down my pencil. I didn't want her to grab my work and muck it up and so I pushed my calculations aside.

I took a gulp or air and smiled. But in all reality I wasn't smiling at Lauren, I was smiling at the women who was listening in attentively from the carrel beyond Lauren.

I leaned back, a second small admission. "No it wasn't here. I sat for her at her home studio. She is working on a sculpture of a Roman Spearman and needed a live model. The sculpture is nearly completed."

"What!", Lauren was getting angrier by each of my admissions.

I pressed on. "But don't worry, we were chaperoned."

There was a flicker of confusion. "What exactly does that mean?"

"Chaperoned?" I drew the word out.

"Yes?" She leaned forward. Her eyes bore into me.

"Obviously Glynis and I were not alone."

She pushed back from the table an arm's length. "Who was with you? Karen … Kristi …?

I shook my head. "not any of them."

"Who then?"

I looked Lauren in her eyes and gave her my best 'do you really want to know' look. He eyes, which had a possessive edge to them, answered me back. And so I weighed up my words and then continued. "Another model she has used."

Lauren would not let up. "And who was that?"

I looked down with a false modesty, then slowly looked up. Two pairs of eyes were watching me as I responded, Lauren and the women watching us from afar. "Her daughter …"

With those words Lauren exploded out of her chair and once again stood ominously over me. She did not say a word. Her face grew redder and redder.

"But it's not what you think … she's an artist in her own right, and quite good."

"I am going to the washroom … " The women in the carrel behind her had just enough time to duck back down into her seat before Lauren turned. "I

will be right back. You better be here when I get back!" Then she stormed off.

I watched her walk away and decided to stay. Had we been alone I would not have felt safe, but the person listening in brought a measure of security. I wasn't sure what Lauren was capable of. If she get violent the other women would be a witness or could go get help. I thought perhaps by the time she returned Lauren would have cooled down a bit. I looked down at my work but I was no longer in the mood to do abstract quantum physics. My mood had shattered like the sheet of ice.

I stood up, stretched and then casually walked over to the women in the carrel. She looked up at me as I approached.

"I hope we aren't bothering you."

She shook her head. "At the start you did," she smiled, "but now your conversation is getting more interesting." I looked down into the carrel at what she was working on. It was an integral calculus assignment.

"I think it is about to getting even more interesting."

"Should I leave?" She asked honestly.

I shook my head. "What … and miss the fun?"

“Fun …”, she looked over her shoulder and dropped her voice. “Is she your girlfriend?”

“No … just a friend who happens to be a girl.” I stopped to think on the matter for a second then made a decision. “I guess she’s more of an acquaintance than a friend.”

She looked around first then up at me and quietly asked. “Did you really model?”

I pretended I did not hear her question and leaned forward. “Come again?”

She repeated her question and I cautiously replied. “Yes … I did last Wednesday for the first and second time all in one day. Now I am beginning to regret the decision.”

She looked at me surprised. “How did you feel?” Her question had a sincerity to it.

I stood up and massaged my neck. “It was quite an experience.”

In a whisper she asked “Did you feel ashamed?”

I shook my head. “Listen can you do me a favour?”

“Sure,” she looked at me with a tad measure of apprehension.

“If things go sideways,” I motioned in the direction that Lauren left with my thumb, “can you go get help?”

She nodded with an understanding, then shrugged a half shrug. To lighten things up with her I decided to change the subject somewhat and looked down again at her calculus question. “Do you need some help with your math?”

“Math is not my strongest subject.”

I took the pencil from her hand and wrote a trig identity down. “It will be easier to solve your integral using this identity. Use the same limits of integration. Just be careful with the signs.”

Just then Lauren reappeared. She immediately snapped. “What are you doing?”

I looked up at her. “Aren’t you the suspicious one! I am helping her with her math.”

Lauren looked down at the calculus equation I had just written then pushed past me and walked back to the table. Once again she had rubbed me the wrong way so I just wrote a quick note to the women at the carrel – ‘*if you need a math tutor call me*’, and I wrote down my name and telephone number then walked back to my books and notes.

I took my time walking back to my seat because I wanted her to stew. Lauren was sitting waiting impatiently for me.

“There’s the mixer tonight at the math department … I want you to come.” She was blunt and to the point. Once again Lauren had no qualms about using me in her chess game with her love sick mathematician. But I would not play her game.

“Oh … is it today?” I feigned indifference, but in fact I was quite annoyed with her for asking me this trick.

“It starts at 6:00.”

I looked at the clock on the wall. It was 3:30. I looked back at Lauren and declared. “I was planning to leave for home in an hour.”

Lauren’s demeanor suddenly changed. I had not said no. I had not said yes. I had merely been indifferent. My sense was indifference would be my only defence with her.

“Besides … I was not invited,” I retorted.

Quick on the draw Lauren re-joined, “everyone who is taking math courses are invited.” I shook my head.

She would not give up. “Why did you not come to the drawing class on Wednesday?” The women poked her head out of the carrel.

“I did not feel up to it.” I thought to myself, I really did not want to go and be played with again.

“But all you had to do was just do some drawing.”

“Oh … did the model show up this time?”

“Yes she did.”

“So I didn’t have to model like last week.”

“No … we drew her. A good two hours. You would have enjoyed it.”

“I am still recovering from standing there naked in front of the six of you women artist. You sort of … ,” I paused, “… set me up!”

“No I didn’t ...” She hesitated a split second. Her response lacked conviction.

“I think you did.” It was my turn to glare at her. “Was everyone there? Ingrid, Glynis, Kristi, Megan and Karen?

“Yes they were.” She thought a moment before continuing. “They all say hello by the way.”

“They would, wouldn’t they.” I giggled. “I gave them an afternoon they would not soon forget.” I was looking down and doodling as I said this, but I knew the woman in the carrel was looking on.

“They wondered if you would be coming next session.” I looked up at Lauren. She continued. “I said I would track you down and invite you.”

“Well you’ve tracked me down.” I looked at her intently. “Is that the ONLY reason, the drawing and the mixer?” I emphasized the adverb only.

There was a hesitation in her voice before she continued. Perhaps it was the edginess in my last comment ‘is that the ONLY reason …’. “Well … I thought we were friends …”

“I barely know you.” The double entendre was meant to cajole her.

“And after what happened in the drawing session last Wednesday … “

“That would have happened to any man enticed by a naked woman, believe me.” The eyes of the interloper grew wide and inquisitive. “You were Eve enticing me, Adam, with not a stitch on you.” A big smile of understanding passed across the face of the woman listening in. “You knew exactly what you were doing!” Indeed she had, but didn’t want to admit it. There was method to her madness, and I knew this.

The women listening seemed to have suddenly understood. Lauren must have sensed her presence for she swiftly turned around and caught her listening in. "Do you mind!" There was a hysterical edge to her retort.

"Leave her be. We are bothering her. You know we should not be talking here in the library." I was wanting to stay and hoping Lauren would leave me be for the rest of the afternoon. I looked down at my work and then back at her, but no luck!

Lauren would not let me stay. "Let's get out of here!" She wanted to have it out with me, about what exactly I was still uncertain. "Let's go for a coffee."

My head hurt and frankly I could use a coffee. But, I thought, not the attendant conversation. Frankly a glass of cold water would have been better for my headache. But if I said no we would be still here when the whole matter unravelled, and unravel it would like the delicate silk thread sheltering a butterfly in his cocoon.

At this stage I did not trust her to act rationally. If she had a meltdown here and now it would stigmatize me and forever mark me as an indifferent paramour, whether I deserved the label or nought and I did like coming to the library anonymously.

"Ok, fine, let us go for coffee." I stood and leaned over the table as I gathered together my things. My head began to throb even more violently as I gathered my things. At least I owed her a few more minutes of my

afternoon, but not the evening. I was not keen to go to the mixer and be played.

My back was now quite painful. I lived in chronic pain but this was more than normal. It was the tension that had suddenly gathered as a knot in my neck and shoulders. Damned, it's going to be a long afternoon, I thought, a dreadfully long afternoon. I looked up at Lauren. What is the expression *…'it is like I have known you for ever*.'

I left the three quantum books flipped opened on the table – Gottfried, Kaempffer and Merzbacher (second edition). With some luck the three textbooks would still be there waiting for me on Monday. Sometimes the librarians know to leave the books were they lay for us harried, itinerant physics students.

Lauren noticed as I stretched my stiff back and so I played that to my advantage. "I will go for coffee for an hour but afterwards I must be on my way home." I grabbed my lower back and began to rub it to loosen my muscles. "As you can see, my neck and back are sore and I have lots of studying." I felt weary and had no regrets. I didn't normally study on a Friday night but perhaps this evening would be an exception.

Lauren shrugged in a non-committal fashion. It was her way of acknowledging the fact without passing judgement as to its importance. Then we were on our way. Lauren marched past the carrel and gave the women a wrathful look. "You shouldn't eavesdrop on others." The kettle calling the pot black I thought.

I walked slowly by and shrugged my shoulders. As I looked down the women, she was drawing an arrow at my telephone number in appreciation. She would call me on Saturday afternoon and I ended up tutoring her several times during the run up to her calculus finals. Afterwards for the rest of the summer we took to meeting occasionally to check out art gallery exhibits and the like. It was a platonic and uncomplicated thing. She graduated the following December and we sort of lost track of each other thereafter. But that's getting ahead of myself.

I followed Lauren out of the library at a discrete distance mind you and in a discrete fashion. First out of the stacks, then through the card box lobby, then down two flights of stairs and out the front doors. I fought the urge to dash down to the right and hide in the men's room. If I did that she would be at me like a bloodhound.

She did not seem to mind the discrete distance, which I found odd. Maybe it was because she had a good number of dalliances scattered around campus and she didn't want to alert them to her take on me.

I didn't mind the discrete distance, for it was merely her take, mind you, not mine. I didn't ask her where we were going because I had already sensed she was taking us to some secret hideaway where we could talk in peace.

She lead the way west two blocks, past the math building and the Bus Stop café to the parking lot just behind the café and a large white Cadillac convertible. As she got into the driver's side I hesitated looking at the

battleship of a car. “It’s my mother’s. She’s away on a family visit to Vienna. She lets me use it when she’s away.” It was quite a statement – a bourgeois expression, more than anything else. Too major of a car for too minor of a driver.

I looked in and saw the seat belts were readily accessible. They were all lined up, front and back. The car was meticulously shiny, cleaned and maintained. That calmed my fear sufficiently for me to get into the car. The thought of Lauren driving might be bad enough, for my sixth sense told me she would be a rather intense driver, but driving such a large and ponderous vehicle weighed on me almost as much as the automobile itself.

I threw my stuff onto the back seat. “Careful,” she huffed. “My mother would kill me if I scratched her car.”

I stood for a few seconds wondering if I should just grab my things and be off. Lauren had already gotten into the car and was about to start the monster. We weren’t in the library anymore and so I was freer to make my escape. Yet something intrigued me about the strangeness of this situation to lure me to get into the car. It wasn’t the reality of her, it was the growing surrealism of her.

I unlocked my door and swung it open, then got in. The solid door weighed a good ton, like the rest of the car, and took an effort on my part to swing it shut. I closed it carefully then put on my seat belt. I turned to her …”so where are we off to for coffee?”

Without looking at me she started the car before answering. "My place for coffee and strudel."

"Why don't we just grab a coffee at the Bus stop?" I pointed to the café as I asked. "Then you can cross the road and go directly to the mixer afterwards." She shook her head and I wondered if she was going to chicken out of the mixer, if she had to go by herself? Then she turned around to look the other way for traffic. So much for going to some public coffee shop. What was her madness, I thought?

Lauren put the car into reverse and then carefully backed the battleship out of the rather constrained space of the parking lot. She hesitated only once when backing out. It was for a car that originally looked like it was going to drive past but when we started to move the driver of that car coveted our spot and was waiting for us to leave. Of all people driving the car it was Professor H. Lauren was too busy driving to notice this.

During the drive Lauren asked me three more times to come with her to the mixer, and I kept on saying the same thing. I can't. Every time she changed her tack, I changed mine and we were at an unresolved stalemate. I asked at one point "why even go?" But she ignored that question by feigning some driving distraction.

We were almost to Granville when she turned onto a side street on 41st and half way up a block and then pulled into the curb with gusto. There were no cars parked on that side of the street. Everyone was evidently hard at work but us two. We had arrived at a split level duplex. It was clear which of the

two abodes was hers by the subtle Austrian features that ordered the outside of one side of the duplex. She bound out and around the front of the car.

I got out. Carefully I closed the door behind me, gathered my stuff out of the back seat and followed her up the walk. She did not look back as we walked to the front door.

The front door had an ornate gothic grill that could be opened from the inside which allowed a secured look out. I smiled, really now. The door was oak and stained in a rich natural colour. The lock was Teutonic. It all seemed to fit together in all-encompassing theme – *Ostreich Herein*!

I followed Lauren through the front door which she quickly closed behind us, but only after looking out to see if anyone had watched us arrive. I found this odd, but in her suspicious mannerism. I looked around at the entrance. It was austere and functional. At least, I thought, we were entering through Lauren's front door, and not the back door as in my recent visit to Glynis's studio.

When the door was closed behind me the first thing I noticed was the smell – it was a mixture of cooked cabbage and perfume, and the cabbage was dominant. Lauren pointed down at my shoes as she said "shoes." She took off her shoes carefully balancing against me as she did this . She had presumed I wouldn't mind her touching me as she balanced herself. I did mind and let her know this by not lending her a hand to steady herself as she did this.

Once again she was wearing a very European dress, with expensive Italian shoes. I know we are not supposed to judge a book by its covering, but are we to judge a woman by her clothing. Her purse was Guicci for sure, not an imitation. The pearls real – necklace and earrings. As she balanced to undo her shoes she deliberately showed her cleavage. But it was at that instance uninteresting. She was imposing herself on me and I did not enjoy that.

I waited until she had removed her shoes before I took mine off. She half expected me to steady myself against her but I kept to myself. Instead of just pushing the shoes off my feet I kneeled down and undid the laces one by one so that later I could be afforded an expeditious get away, and then stood before using one toe to push off the other shoe, one side then the other.

It was a longimanous and deliberate act meant to annoy her. I wanted to gauge her anxiousness and angst. Her expression told me that my tactic worked.

"Do you always take your shoes off this way?"

I smiled at her and nodded. My act was working. Patience was not her forte. She was one for instant gratification. She stood between me and the rest of her house. I looked beyond her into the house. "Nice place you have here."

With a sour expression on her face she invited me in. "Come in." She led the way in and I followed her. Off to the left, the entrance had a small washroom with blue-grey tiling. To the right the big parlour had a baby

grand, a grand fireplace and a giant crystal chandelier, as well as several turn of the last century beige and light blue furnishings. She wanted to usher me into the parlour and sit me down, but I wanted to see more of the house.

"Let me help you with the coffee …" I volunteered.

She took the hint and walked me past the dining room, again turn of the last century with a large oak sideboard, and into the kitchen that had modern, high end stainless steel kitchen equipment. The kitchen was more than just what two women would need merely for themselves. Obviously the kitchen was meant for entertaining, as was the dining room and the parlour.

"Quite a house you have here. You must throw some rather nice parties."

As she filled the kettle and placed it on the stove Lauren's face brightened up. "Yes, my mother likes her parties."

"And you?" She shook her head and turned back towards the Bodum coffee maker that she was filling with new ground coffee she was just grounding using a hand grinder. I shrugged. I guess unlike daughter, like mother. "But you do enjoy the parties your mother throws?"

She turned back to face me. "Some of them, especially Christmas and New Years." She walked over to the refrigerator and took out a tray of apple strudel with white sugar icing. Aha, she was expecting me, I thought. She had planned this rendezvous.

“Yes I imagine you would… and you are asked to play the piano?”

She nodded. I somehow knew, she being of Austrian heritage, that she would like classical music. “Would you like to hear me play something on the baby grand? Before I could answer, she walked past me carrying the plate of strudel into the dining room and then into the parlour. I followed her dawdling to admire the old furniture. On the side board was arranged several rows of crystal glasses of different sizes and function. By the time I had arrived in the parlour Lauren had already set the plate of apple strudel down on the coffee table and had sat herself down at the piano and launched into a Chopin nocturne. She was playing from memory for there was no sheet music set in front of her.

As she played I walked around the parlour admiring the paintings and lithographs. Out of the corner of my eye I could see she was looking at me as I surveyed the room. I stopped in front of one of the paintings, which was a reproduction of Adam and Eve by the Italian Antonio Molinari painted in 1704. I turned to Lauren as I stood before the painting and she immediately turned back to her playing.

Then it struck me. There was an underlying theme to her actions towards me, right down to the drawing session from last week. She was obviously not the vestal Eve, but in her mind’s eye she was virginal and chaste in her tempestuousness. She had an appetite and was compelled to feed it. It was one of her compulsions.

I turned back to the painting. Eve was at Adam's feet pointing to an apple that was unseen and behind him. The serpent was looking on from the right. Eve was draped over his left thigh, her breast against his leg. Here was compulsion! She was enticing him and he was trying not to be enticed. Adam was looking off into the distance trying to reason with her. She was not listening.

I glanced back to her as I continued my walk around the room. She was not paying attention to me, but trying to entice me with the nocturne. Lauren had told me she had grown up without a father. This would have left a large lack of masculine empathy in her psyche – in her Viennese Id.

Just as I thought this I happened before a book shelf of mostly German books. There before me was a whole row of books by Sigmund Freud with German titles about Psychoanalysis which I could not understand because I could not speak German. The next row down of books were art books. I recognized some of the art books by their covers. I pulled one of the familiar books off the shelf, a book about the *Divine Proportion* and then flipped it open to the page with the Roman Spearman. In fact it was a bronze statue of Zeus.

I turned to face her as she played the last bars of the nocturne. She had an envy, and that envy was now obvious to me. Was it obvious to her I thought? It would be obvious to Sigmund Freud. She also had a number of neurosis, but these were more complicated. I wondered if I would have to leave the neuroses to psychoanalysis.

“Here’s the Roman Spearman.” I tilted the open book to show her the picture from across the room. She ignored me. I put the book back on the shelf and turned to face her. She had stood up from the baby grand and was watching me awkwardly. Who would make the first move?

Then the kettle began to whistle and, obviously relieved, Lauren bounded back into the kitchen leaving me alone in the parlour. I did a complete survey of the room from its centre. The piano and fireplace were special. I looked up … but the Chandelier was even more-so.

I was curious and so I walked over to the wall switch and without asking for permission I flicked on the Chandelier. The room now sparkled with a bright blue effervescence. It was remarkable beyond words. As I write these words the remarkableness of the moment returns.

I had heard her returning and didn’t want to share the moment of discovery with her, but I was too late. Just as I was about to flick off the chandelier Lauren returned with the coffee tray.

I didn’t need to ask for she answered … “it’s seventeenth century. It comes from a castle north east of Vienna. It was removed from the castle to keep it out of the hands of the Red Army in 1945.” I looked at the chandelier again then turned it off. It was plunder was it. I am not surprised. The room returned to its previous dull white-blue ambivalence.

I could have asked but I decided not to. I didn’t want to get drawn into a conversation of geopolitics. She was part Austrian, for god sakes, and so

such a conversation would be complicated. Lauren placed the tray down on the coffee table and sat down. She motioned for me to join her on the couch.

I sat but at a discrete distance. She offered me a strudel on a fine china plate, complete with silver fork. She next poured and offered me my coffee, black, no spoon. Before I was comfortable she snatched at me.

"So why is it you don't want to come to the math mixer?" She would not let the matter drop. She quickly served herself.

I took a taste of the strudel and a sip of coffee then set the strudel down on the table next to my coffee.

Without looking at her I asked "Can't you let the matter drop?" When she asked me, once again, once again the muscles on my neck and shoulders tightened. My headache immediately got worst. "All this talk about the mixer is giving me a headache."

I took another sip of the coffee. Suddenly it tasted quite bitter. I was surprised and set the coffee down and then took up the strudel again nibbling away at the sweeter icing portions. Lauren was studying me intently. I did not look at her but concentrated on the strudel I was enjoying.

For the first time I could hear the action of the cuckoo clock on the wall across the room. As I looked up at it the cuckoo peeked out and whistled. It was now five o'clock. I set the strudel down on the table.

Lauren looked at me for a few seconds, probably sensing I wanted to go, then she asked. "Would you like to see the rest of the house?" There was a softness in her voice. Perhaps she had seen me react to the coffee when I grabbed the strudel. My headache was so bad that I needed the sweet not the bitter.

She set down her strudel, now nearly finished, and stood up. I followed her and we walked out of the parlour and up the stairs. The bannister on the stairs was carved oak, and not very modern. "Is this from Austria too?"

"Yes, 18th century." I followed her up the stairs. This elegance was beginning to get under my skin. As I followed Lauren up the stairs I thought back to Glynis and wondered what she was doing at this particular instance, and imagined her hard at work in her studio on the Roman spearman. There was a simplicity in her artistic life that was direct and honest.

At the top of the landing, at the top floor to the duplex there were three rooms and one bathroom. The front room was her mother's, and out of bounds to visitors, so Lauren declared with solemnity. I imagined she only being asked in on special occasions. Next there was also an unadorned study.

The back room was Lauren's, functional, prim and proper, yet austere with a four post bed in full regalia, and a dressing table, and full length mirror. There was a bit of colour in a large print of Klimt's painting the Kiss. She wanted me to enter but I did not feel safe and so I did not. I stood at the door for a moment to look in and then turned back into the hallway. When a

woman invites you into her bedroom and you decline that is a rather direct message. No thank you – I am very catholic.

Then there was the bathroom. The bathroom was exquisite. It was well furnished and the piece de resistance was a stand-alone bathtub that was 19th century with claw feet and silver faucets. The bathtub took my breath away.

As I stood admiring it Lauren suddenly and unexpectedly asked "would you like to try it out?" I turned to her to try to gauge whether she was serious. She had read my mind. "You're not the first to want to try this bathtub. Many people who visit us ask. Sometime we let them sometimes we don't"

She leaned over and set the plug in place and turned on the water. "Hot, medium or cool." I thought for a moment and then decided, well why not. My back was sore and I had to make my way home across town on the bus. I could use a hot, quick one.

"Thank you. Medium would be fine to begin with." I leaned over and tested the water. It was lusciously warm. I wasn't going to be modest because we were beyond modesty here.

"I will get some towels." Lauren left me to my own to take off my things and get in. When she returned her intentions were obvious to me. She was only wearing a robe and she was carrying two large light blue towels.

Ah, now I understood 'I will get some towels.' She expected to hop in and join me as part of the deal. "I thought you might want company," she said.

If I had known she was expecting to join me I would have passed on trying the bath. Perhaps I was naïve … because I should have seen this coming.

There wasn't much I could do. I was already in the bath tub and it was her house and she sets the rules, and well she had been clever and had set the rate of water such that went she came back there would be enough free volume for her to step in without over-flowing the tub.

And that is exactly what she did. She unwrapped herself from her robe and sprung out and then unceremoniously stepped in, with her backside to me. Lauren made herself comfortable without pressing too readily against me. My legs were entangled around the outside of her hips and lower body. The bathtub was so large there was room for two with some space left over.

As I looked over her right shoulder her form seemed to float ethereally and the cavern between her two legs took a life of its own, curved as a convex lens drawing me visually. The angle was most intriguing.

Now settled in, Lauren was pleased with herself and splashed some water on breasts. I said nothing for fear of provoking her to some brash act, a silence which perhaps disappointed her. A minute passed then she asked me quite unexpectedly "do you mind if I add some bath salts?"

That was a pretty neutral thing to ask and so I answered her. "I have never had a bath with bath salts."

I could tell my ambivalence was not well received by her. Lauren took a handful of pink balls the size of large marbles out of a dish on a small wooden table next to the bath and threw them in. The pink balls began to effervesce, filling the water with rose oil. The perfume was the same perfume I had sensed on her when we were modeling as Adam and Eve beside each other in the studio.

"Oh well, then this will be a real treat." She emphasized the word REAL. "I bet you have never shared a bath with a woman before either.

I felt a bit cocky and so asked, "when you let others try your bathtub do they get such royal treatment?"

Lauren replied "… of course not!" She leaned forward, opening the distance between us. "What do you think I am … a bathtub concubine."

I splashed her with some water. She looked back over her shoulder. "I thank you for the royal treatment." I rubbed the lower part of Lauren's back as I said this, in sort of a gesture of kindness more than anything else. This was not meant to arouse her, only to appease.

"What's wrong with you?" She did not look at me as she asked this.

"What do you mean?" I replied as neutral as I could because I did not feel like I wanted to engage her in any substantive way.

“I am throwing myself at you, and you are throwing me back.” Lauren was still sitting forward as she said this. “Don’t you like me?”

“It’s not a question of liking.” How do you answer a question like this sitting in a bath with the woman who is asking such a question? “I hadn’t expected to take a bath here, nor to have company in the bath any more than I expected to model for art class last week, and to model with you last week. Everything is happening too fast and out of my say.”

“Other men would envy you.”

I stopped rubbing her back and asked the obvious question. “Why are you throwing yourself at me?” She left my question unanswered.

“Why do you want me to go with you to the math mixer tonight?” Again she did not answer my question. She started to move as if she was going to get out of the bathtub.

“Don’t go.” She stopped moving. “Lean back.” She obeyed but didn’t say a thing. When she had settled back I took a handful of water and dripped it across her breasts. She did not flinch. I could not see her face but could see that her earlobes were bright red. I sensed anger in her.

“Are you angry at me?”

“Yes …”

“Why? … because I won’t come to the mixer?” Again silence. It must be something bigger. We sat for a minute or two.

I decided perhaps to change the conversation for a few minutes. “I noticed all the Freud books on the shelf in your parlour.”

“They are my mother’s books.” There was a slight dipping of her chin as she said mother. Interesting I thought. There are issues between and her mother. Lauren continued. “She studied at the University in Vienna.”

I pressed on. “I don’t know much about Freud …do you?”

“I’ve read a few of his books. The ones my mother recommended to me. Freud’s book the Interpretation of Dreams, I found very interesting.”

I drew out what little I had heard about him from memory. But I knew that it would not meet her expectations. Nonetheless I pressed on. “What interests you most about his psychoanalysis? … his envies .. his neurosis?” With the mention of the word neurosis there was slight twitch in her face. I just caught the edge of the twitch.

There was a hesitation then an answer. It was a truthful one … “neurosis.”

I waited a moment just in case she would say more, but Lauren remained silent. I guess being asked this question by a man in her own bath tub forced her to be honest with him and with herself.

“Do you talk with anyone about your neurosis?” I was once again venturing into an undiscovered country.”

“Yes I do … I go see a therapist once a week.” I was intrigued because I had heard of such things in movies but never in real life.

“”Tell me about your session with your therapist. Is it like in the movies … where you lay back on a couch and all?”

Lauren laughed, and as she did so she giggled, generously sloshing the bath water over the edge of the bathtub and onto the floor. “No I don’t lay back on a couch. We just sit and talk.” We both went silent.

I could hear the water trickle down the drain on the floor. If there is one sound I find annoying it is dripping water, and so for a few minutes as we continued our conversation the background dripping got on my nerves.

From my unique vantage point as she laughed I could appreciate the generous nature of her bosom. The bathwater water tickled the undersides of her breasts and she responded in the most monumental fashion. I took to dripping more water on her to speed along the progression. With her arousal their shape was changing.

“What do you talk about?”

“It depends on what we want to talk about.”

“We?”

“Sometimes I bring up the topic … sometimes my therapist does. We have even talked about you.”

“Really … I bet you will be talking more about me after this afternoon?” With my hand I poured some water onto her belly button and watched it fill before trickling down towards the hidden finest of her.

She watched as the water trickle down across her. “Yes … I guess we will.” As I poured more water into her belly button Lauren fidgeted in the bath. “Can we talk about something else?” The water was obviously having its effect. The convex nature of her was becoming more conspicuous.

“Yes … I guess we can.” But what, I thought, could we talk about?” She did not say anything in response to my question.

Again I felt cocky. “Do you miss not having a dad?” I don’t know why I chose to ask her this but the effect was electric. Lauren bolted up and got out of the bath. Then she stood there glaring down at me.

“Why did you ask that?” Lauren was clearly angry. I think I just pressed her button.

“I was curious.” I just look out at her from the bathtub. There she stood glaring at me, dripping onto the floor.

“Well, if you must know … my father ran off with one of his grad students, leaving my mother and I when I was three.”

Then I looked down at myself. I felt terrible asking that question but I couldn’t admit it. There was a moment of silence.

Then Lauren wrapped herself in her robe without drying herself and then placed her hands on her hips. “I think it is time we both go.”

With that I started to get up out of the bath. She handed me a towel and then turned tail and left me alone to dry myself and get dressed. When I stepped out of the bathroom I knew to make my way directly down the stairs. There she was sitting on the bottom stair waiting for me. In the few minutes that I had taken to dress she had changed into a new dress and was decked out for the mixer.

It didn’t matter if she had asked me time and time again, she now definitely wanted to go to the mixer by herself. I didn’t argue.

We got into her mother’s car and sped off down the street even before I had time to put my seatbelt on and onto Granville where she dropped me off with a jolt at a convenient bus stop. Lauren didn’t even say good bye as she made off back to the university. It was a quarter before the hour ...

Yes I had pressed her button. That ominous feeling that I had woken with that morning – well it turned out it wasn’t directed at me, as I would find out. I would not see her again until the following Tuesday.

The Search for Beauty

{The Royal Bank of Canada, Newsletter, December 1950}

Beauty is as much a necessity of our everyday life as bread. If our lives are to be more than mere existence, they demand something besides a weekly pay cheque, three meals a day, and a roof over our heads. There must be food for the mind and the eye, the soul and the spirit.

The thought of beauty, its expressions, and the love of it have been present in the minds of men every century. Writers and artists have spent their lives capturing and immortalizing the beautiful in words and in paint; the men of the Middle Ages made lasting monuments to beauty and the glory of God in the building of great cathedrals; ordinary people have been inspired and uplifted by beauty in their physical and spiritual lives.

As far back as 25,000 years ago, in the early stone age, paintings on the walls of caves in France and Spain show the desire of men to create, and to rise beyond the limitations of the daily struggle to keep alive. We today are also struggling in an anxious world – and if ever any people needed some power outside themselves to give relief from worry and alarms, we do. We are more fortunate than our forefathers, for we have the accumulated culture and wisdom of the ages to draw upon.

We use the word "beautiful" dozens of times a day, to describe anything from a new fashion to a sunset but what actually is beauty?

Great thinkers have defined it in many ways, some of which we might quote. One of the best known, one that has had far reaching influence, is the teaching of Plato: Beauty is the splendor of truth. The influence of this can be seen in the lines written by Keats, in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." ...

Ruskin, in *The True and the Beautiful*, had this to say: "Any material object which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities, without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect, I call in some way, or in some degree, beautiful." But perhaps the simplest definition of all is that given by St. Thomas Aquinas: "That which when seen pleases."

These descriptions can include everything in life, from a bride to an advertisement, from a bird-song at dawn to a radio broadcast, from a heather-covered mountain to a department store window.

We live in a world that abounds in beauty, but sometimes we are too absorbed in ourselves, our pursuits, and our problems, to see the beauties. We scarcely notice the small unselfishness of the single flower; it is the grand gesture or the big bouquet that ordinarily calls forth our admiration.

But there is beauty all around us, in poetry and in paintings, in our vast forests and our own back-gardens, in city streets and business offices and in factories, and in the lives of saints and ordinary men. To feel this beauty makes the imagination richer, and the world more interesting.

An editorial in a Montreal newspaper called attention to three kinds of beauty:

> ‘First there is the beauty of the senses, the joy that comes from loveliness of color, line, form, and tone. A second aspect of beauty exists in the understanding of the origin and being of Nature (including human beings). This constitutes science. The third form of beauty lies in seeking the meaning of beautiful things we see, and the purpose they express. The deeper and farther we go in the search for beauty, the higher we rise beyond the physical and sensuous to the spiritual sphere.’

We were all born with an eye for beauty, but when we were children we were perhaps more closely akin to the homespun beauties of the world. The softness of a kitten's fur, the brightness of an autumn leaf, the first fresh snowfall, these were all sources of wonderment and pleasure. As time went by, and sophistication set in, we lost this first fine appreciation of beauty, our eyes were not so open to the simple things which once gave us pleasure, and our outlook became not so alert and eager. We lost some of our natural eye for beauty and with it we have lost some of our happiness too.

... The cultivation of love of the beautiful is not a special privilege, the preserve of the few or the possession of a caste. Beauty is ours to enjoy without money and without price – a rewarding joy within the reach of all. It has nothing to do with technical ability or wealth or high education.

We cannot all create beauty or be artists in the grand manner. Not many of us will write a great novel, paint a masterpiece, or perform on the concert platform. But everyone of us is capable of creating beauty in one form or another, and of appreciating it even more widely. The woman taking a well-baked loaf out of the oven, the man gathering vegetables from the garden he has carefully tended, the mother telling a story to her children, and the employer who makes a congenial working atmosphere for his employees – all of these are creating something that is beautiful. Beauty can be small, but it can never be insignificant if it adds to the enrichment and dignity of human life.

In all the arts there has always been a controversy of opinion concerning what is beautiful. In commenting on Turner's painting, *The Slave Ship*, Ruskin wrote that it was "*perfect and immortal*." The painter Inness declared: "*It's claptrap*." Thackeray was puzzled and neutral: "*I don't know whether it's sublime or ridiculous*."

Eric Newton, the British critic, said some years ago that there is no real test of beauty, because beauty is the expression of the artist's aesthetic excitement. If one person shares that excitement and another does not, then the former thinks the work beautiful, and the latter thinks it ugly. When we say that there is beauty in a picture, what we really mean is that that particular arrangement of colors and forms causes a state of mind in us which is good ...

In our choice of the beautiful, familiarity plays a big part. We all cherish scenes and memories which "flash upon that inward eye" to strengthen and

uplift us, and on these our future choices of the beautiful are based. These things of beauty, like a great affection, a clear thought, or a profound faith, are eternal possessions.

We cannot, of course, retain everything in our own personal storehouse of beauty. Something that we find shining with beauty at one time we may find later has lost interest for us; this holds true for people and paintings, books and memories. There is an interesting variation of this. As time passes, and we undergo wider and more varied experiences, we can and do return to people and to art and discover new beauties and new values which we did not see in earlier years.

An example of this is to be seen in the work of the Canadian artists who are known as the *Group of Seven*. When their work first appeared, about thirty years ago, it was adversely criticized in some quarters. Today the work of these artists, which includes such great names as Tom Thomson, Lawren Harris, and Dr. Arthur Lismer, is considered by the majority of our people as being typically Canadian. It has captured the character and flavor of our country.

Where can we look for beauty? Where can we search and be sure of our reward?

Art may sometimes disappoint and confuse us, but Nature never. The effect of natural beauty is to elevate us to a higher level. We cannot look upon a great natural scene, a serpentine river, a snow-capped mountain, or a green and gentle meadow, without feeling remote from our personal pettiness. We

cannot, in these days, and all of us would not, even if we could, follow Thoreau in choosing a hermit's life by a Walden pond, but natural beauty can play a vital part in raising our lives from the humdrum to the enjoyable.

Even a city dweller walking quickly along a crowded street can catch some moment of natural beauty. often a shaft of sunlight striking a church spire, a strange and interesting formation of clouds, or the delicate outline of an ancient weathered tree, can pierce our busy day with a little stab of pure delight ...

The nearer one is to nature the more instinctive art becomes. It has been said that art is the one thing we all want, the expression of man's joy in his work. Line, form, color, and sound all play a part in widening our mental and spiritual horizons, stimulating our senses and our imagination. Art is the work of the whole spirit of man … it is not something extraneous to life, but the way by which vital needs are perfectly satisfied,

Before the industrial era, there was greater opportunity for creative expression within the limitations of a man's working day. The craftsman, making things painstakingly by hand, had a particular pride in his whole artistic achievement.

Today, with the fragmentation of production, there is not this satisfying sense of creation.

Since many of us do not derive this full artistic satisfaction from our daily work, they must find the answer elsewhere … in the broadening of our culture in our leisure time …

It is quite true that we cannot all become outstanding in the arts. But a man is not an artist only because of what he writes or makes, but because of what he feels. To have imagination and taste, and to love the best, is an accomplishment in itself.

To live in these days is a strenuous experience, demanding more than ever before of vigor, thought, and spirit. When, then, we learn to enjoy beauty as we seek it and find it, we are indulging (as it were by proxy) an instinct which in other times and other circumstances would find expression in the doing of beautiful things …

It is true that we can create an atmosphere of beauty and grace with the wealth of goods that modern ingenuity and manufacturing have developed and perfected, but the very first seeds of beauty lie within ourselves.

If we cultivate the many attributes of beauty in our relationships with our families and our associates, we carl achieve a happiness and a spiritual content such as no possession of material goods can give us. The understanding ear, the appreciative eye, the open mind, and the generous heart are not only blessings to us who possess them, but their benefits extend to all those whose lives touch ours, no matter how slightly. By beautifying our social and domestic existence, we can all be artists in life.

We can educate ourselves intellectually and spiritually to see the maximum of beauty … in the world of nature, of art, and of human beings. By this aesthetic education we will achieve not only that general sense of steadfastness and resource which is perhaps the kernel of happiness, but a new joy and meaning in living.

It is a fundamental truth that nothing but the good enters into the beautiful. In this largest sense of the word, beauty - the yearning for it, the search for it, and the contemplation of it – has civilized mankind.

Remembrances and Francesca Woodman

Off the top let me say that I never met nor knew Francesca Woodman. I have seen some of her artwork, that is her photography, both in the real and over the internet. I recently was reminded of her by a self-portrait she had done with a lily, and a short spiel, a mere inch and a half column, about her that appeared in the New Yorker. The New Yorker column related to a retrospective that the Guggenheim was giving her, over three decades after her sad and untimely demise. I will return to a hidden aspect of this photograph at the end of this remembrance.

Woodman self-portrait with a lily is unique. She is so beautiful and so real. The recent seeing of this picture of this young lady sitting there, so sure of herself, almost brought tears to my eyes. Let me try to tell you why.

We all know that at a young age of 22 Ms. Woodman took her life in the early 1980. I am about her age had she lived to the present day. At the time of Woodman's suicide I was dating a girl that could, for all intents and purposes, be her twin sister. I read of Francesca's suicide in the New York Times on an afternoon that I was at coffee with my friend and remember the chill that went down my spine when I looked up from the picture in the New York Times and at my friend who sat a few mere inches away from me enjoying her cup of tea, feet curled up under her in her chair.



Woodman Self Portrait with Lily.

She looked down at the obituary and then at me and asked about my tortured expression on my face. "Did you know her?" she asked. Overcome by emotion, all I could do is shake my head. My friend then set down her cup of tea and said "You look as pale as a ghost," or something along that line. I closed the newspaper, carefully folded it and set it down at the edge of the table. My hands were shaking. This calmed me a small measure, but just a small measure.

Her sad story strangely moved me. My friend reached across the table and in doing so knocked the newspaper off. It fell with a thud on the ground. We both looked down at it. Then she looked up at me and asked me "What

are you thinking." Before I tell you what I replied let me take you on a journey of sorts.

No … my love interest did not come to a tragic end. She did not take her life. It's just that we had a passionate and complicated relationship, and she looked just like Francesca Woodman, both clothed and in the best suit that she owned, right down to the shape of her figure, which was neither thin, nor Rubenesque, but just right for who she was. Anyone who has done figurative arts also knows that the figure can take on many different weights depending on the pose and placement of the model. You can see that in the Woodman photographs.

In seeing the recent picture of Woodman and the lilies, I think it was as much the figurative nature of the picture as the shoes and socks that she was wearing that affected me. My love interest of the day was so passionate that she sometimes expressed her carnal vigor even before she had doffed her socks and shoes. And when she sat, as Francesca sits in the picture, her breasts took on the shape and size of two plum, ripe pomegranates. Go and look again at Woodman and her lily.

My love interest was a complicated creature, the daughter of a well traveled university professor and it was my realization sometime after we had parted our ways that I was perhaps a bit too complicated for her, but in my own ways. Perhaps that is what drew us together there and then. It was what eventually drew us apart.

It I had been wise at the time I might have picked up a pencil and paper and sketched her, for she was very, very beautiful. And since this was before the proliferation of digital cameras, let alone their invention, I could have perhaps taken up my vintage 3 x 3 box camera and been both bold and artistic with her. I think she might have let me be bold and artistic. She was proud of who she was and to this day I have yet to encounter a tuft of hair as soft and as exciting as what topped the best of her. If I had taken some pictures you would be hard pressed to distinguish her from Francesca.

In the Woodman pictures one must wonder if this softness was also the case for her as well. In for instance in her *self-portrait against the rock*, her flowing hair and the rough texture of the limestone behind her draws you to this same conclusion, the softness and the exhilaration she felt. This picture is one of the most beautiful in her portfolio, and whenever I see it I wonder if Ms. Woodman knew this.

When she did this photograph, a joyful self-portrait, new ground was being broken on the question of what was art, and what was not. While others were grabbing the headlines like Maplethrope, and the attendant notoriety and wealth, Woodman just continued to be herself. From what we are told she wanted neither notoriety nor headlines, although I wonder if she might have done better with a little more wealth. I have never been a fan of Maplethorpe and don't think him a great artist.



Woodman Self-portrait – Against the Rock

Perhaps it is because I am a man, who admires the beauty of woman. Perhaps it is because I have sat as an artist model and been told I am as Michelangelo's David – both handsome and beautiful.

Or perhaps it is, as I tell my artist friends that God created woman after man because she learned from her mistakes, and won an award for the creation of woman. Men are all straight lines, and sharp angles, while woman are the organic and the sublime. Tell me you can see this in the Woodman self-portraits. Tell me you can see the symmetry of her as well. Tell me you are not sad she is no more!

As we know, Francesca Woodman died in abject poverty, which happens more often than one can imagine with artists who are at the leading edge of

things. And as is usual with so many unique artists they become more famous after their demise than during their lifetimes. Where were her friends and admirers when Woodman was impoverished, near the end of her life and on medication for depression?

Her face in the portrait of Francesca sitting near the end of her life in a chair at the corner of studio says a great deal as does the rather provocative nature of the picture. The contour of her is evident. She also looks so tired and defeated.



Woodman near the end

When I look at this picture of *Woodman near the end* I am disappointed in not being able to see whether she was in bare feet. My guess is she was. And what to make of the furs draped over the back of the chair. Were they

there before she sat to have her portrait taken or are they there to give some hidden meaning to the photograph? Her bohemian lifestyle can be seen in the keepsakes on the window ledge to her left, right down to the single rose in the glass vase. Despite her poverty she still finds the need to have something red, soft, beautiful and transitory there beside her, so that she could lose herself in its reality merely by looking at it.

Just prior to the coffee conversation with my love interest in 1980, she had had back surgery for a ruptured disk. And so she was in recovery. It was not a new thing, but an old gymnastic injury from her 13th year that was probably made worst by some of our more recent gymnastics. I too had back problems and of a severe sort but somehow our chronic pain did not dampen our excitement. It was perhaps one of the things that brought us together. I would learn from this that the only way to overpower chronic and debilitating pain was to find joy and pleasure in its many manifestations.

As I have gotten older I have also gotten healthier and today I am told I have the physique of someone half my age. And I was handsome. In the early 1980's I looked a bit like Tom Selleck. I was a man of the times. It case you wonder, today I look like Henri Matisse. And I am still called handsome by woman I do not even know. Are woman really that lonely?

And my love interest, were I to have been bold and artistic I might have taken a picture like *Woodman – Back* to celebrate the successful amends of my friends ailing spine.



Woodman Back

I have a fascination with the structure of the spine, given that mine is so damaged. In the picture of Woodman's back there is a sublime youthfulness. Perhaps it is the pony tails. Perhaps it is that unknown object that she has in her hand. Whether it is a daisy or a button, or even a cameo it essentially says the same thing, doesn't it. Perhaps it is the soft curve of her hips? And you could almost reach out and caress the smoothness of her back and marvel on the perfection of her form.

And where she has placed her hand is at the small of the back with its dimples and inverted V which serves to hide some of her mystique. If she

were facing us she might place her hand to modestly cover her V itself. This simple photograph has much depth for those who look beyond the obvious.

My love interest of the day was not so lucky. Her back was scarred by her surgeries. But still I did not see her back very often except when she asked me to massage it. More times it was I on my back as she was over me. In recent years I have written a poem *Oh Dorothea* about our first encounter, and even wrote it into a radio play I submitted to the BBC, thinking perhaps if the BBC produced it and she heard the poem she would know it is about her and I and well, an intercourse of two lovers that I cannot easily forget. That begs the question, does she remember? I would hope yes, but does it really matter? Given the challenges of my life I always remember happiness, and try to forget as much of the rest. Pain is pain, and it is not always of a physical nature, one's *joi de vivre* can also suffer too.

After her second surgery we both realized that our copulative gymnastics had to end. I must be honest that I was relieved, for it had taken a toll on me and my spine as well. Our relationship did change at that point and in a moment of awkwardness I of course drew the wrong conclusion and asked her to marry me. To borrow a phrase from the times my friend's response … why … "*Girls Just What to Have Fun*." Crack went my heart and well, the pieces took a long time to fit back together, if they were even ever able to be fit back together again properly. I imagine some of you know what I am saying.

And so she had the last of her fun with me, drained my heart of whatever was left for her, left me there on my back exhausted in both body and soul

and then took up with some other bloke with a bigger car (a Jaguar) and thicker pocket book. My love interest of the day had an English heritage. Well all good things do come to an end. He had his twelve cylinders compared to my eight. After we parted our ways I never heard from her again, although I occasionally think of her. .

Then I saw the Woodman photo in the New Yorker, and I spent a recent Saturday afternoon searching up more of Woodman's other pictures, many of which I had seen before but some three decades back. Memories flooded back.

Woodman's *Self-portrait Against the Wall* made me think of an afternoon my love interest and I went skinny dipping at a small lake near Vancouver. We hadn't planned to do this but after several hours of hiking up one of the local mountains we saw this pristine blue glacial lake beckoning us and it being the middle of a bright and hot August day, in we went.

Anyone who knows of glacial melt knows that water can be near zero and still remain fluid. The scream of surprise she let out was as much one of pleasure as of pain, as anyone whose had the best of them plunged into cold water can attest. As the cold water tickled the best of her she ran screaming out of the lake and then sat herself down into some ersatz sand near the water's edge. Just to prove my manliness I stayed in a few seconds longer until the best of ached in the coldness.

When I came to join her sitting at the water's edge she reveled in the fact that cold water does rather obvious and unavoidable things to boys' toys.

She wanted to tease me but I was of course too shocked by the water to appreciate her intentions and well, I pushed her away and she rolled once in the sand and the dividing line was that as shown in the Woodman *Self-portrait Against the Wall*.

And how look it took to get the sand out of her femininity. The cold water aroused her and I, and well, we were soon in need to jump back into the frigid water to cool ourselves off. We arrived back home much later than we expected and needed a nap to recover from our hike. And our legs were a bit shaky on the trek down from the pinnacle.



Woodman – Against the Wall

Well, to be perfectly frank as I only recently admired a few of the Woodman pictures for the first time, my remembrances of my love interest of the day

seems to get more and more strong and certain. What am I to say of this than ask whether time has played a game on my memory or whether my remembrances are in fact truthful. Isn't art about a search for truth? From her grave Woodman is speaking to me and my life, through her photographs.

The only picture I have at hand of my love interest of the day is a picture taken at a birthday party, I think my twenty second. In that picture there is one great difference between my love interest and Ms. Woodman, and that is that my love interest is smiling. Except towards the end, my Dorothea always smiled with me, sometimes with more conviction than others. And of course her cheeks were rosy too at times. As I write this I can almost feel her kiss and taste her in my mouth, that is how strong my remembrances of her, my first, are. And who has loved until they have kissed both lips, those seen and those imagined, as I once wrote in a poem. In my remembrance I have Woodman's photographs to thank for this. Her art has had that profound an effect on me.

In all but one of the pictures I have seen of Woodman her expression has been a stern or unhappy one. The one picture that I have seen a smile in Francesca Woodman is when she was with a friend and well being rather spontaneous, popping open their dresses to reveal their breasts. We know woman's breasts are so powerful a symbol. In another of my poems I write that they are meant not merely to suckle babies, but to drive men crazy and of course make them envious.

As I recently told a friend, when medical science finally realizes that breast milk to be a source of stem cells, then *les Seins* may prove to be a river of

not merely happiness, but a fountain of some youthfulness. But medical science is slow to understand the full potential of fullness. Perhaps this picture of Woodman and her friend could inspire medical science?

That picture Woodman and her friend is timeless, and could express the candor of any pair of women of any time during the past two hundred years in North America. They could be someone's grandmother and the era could be the depression and the dirty thirties, for all we know. We are told it is Francesca and friend when she was yet not twenty. But I must say that her face looks older than the rest of her and so what of that?



Woodman and her friend.

It is hard to really see that Woodman is in fact in the picture, because she is smiling and because her breasts look so much different because she is not

sulking but is standing proud ly. When she does decide to stand, she stands tall. Some of her best art comes from the proudness of her. But don't read too much in that statement for what that word proud has become, having been commandeered by politics by the Maplethrope crowd.

When Woodman stands proudly, it is also to have fun and express herself in a different way, such as before and after the milk scene in one of her videos,



Milk – before

Before the milk she is a Greek or Roman Goddess, perfect in her inception. She is mighty Aphrodite!



Milk – after

The vulgarity of the milk pushes her off her pedestal and topples her to earth. She is mortal again. I wonder if Francesca knew that when she was filming this video, and if she did, what she thought of this. I much prefer her as Aphrodite, don't you? But performing art is about the present and the vulgar isn't it? Were it not so.

Today I spend some of my time writing and some of my time doing art and were I so blessed by an artist's model who was as beautiful as Francesca Woodman before her fall, frankly I would spend all my time doing art.

One of her most remarkable photographs is, I believe, as powerful as Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring. It is Francesca sitting at the edge of a chair posed in the manner of a coquette towards the lens of the camera.



Woodman at the Edge of Her Chair

Look how her feet are placed. And she is teetering near the edge. Can you figure out why? Let me give you a clue. She where the middle finger of her right hand is placed, and then where the fingers of her left hand, caressing her thigh. Then look closely at her eyes. In a few more seconds her coquetry would become obvious. But did or even can a photography truly capture that moment? Not even a Brassai could answer such a question. The picture at the edge in its mystique forces us to ask this very

question. It is a remarkably modern Odalisque, and it is as if for a moment mighty Aphrodite and set time still

And the simplicity of her compositions speaks to her artistic praxis. And how is this Woodman at the Edge of Her Seat composed? In thirds, or if you are even more bold, in the Golden Ratio! And if it is the Golden Ratio, where is the sweet spot? Frankly, I think this picture should be hanging in the MOMA in New York. When I have a moment I will write a poem about grace and title it *Woodman at the Edge of Her Chair*.

And what about Francesca holding the plate? The way her hands hold the plate, I wonder if she admired Escher's self-portrait of his hands? And the plate is plain and empty. What of it? Is she saying her heart and soul is empty too, for she is holding the plate over her heart and once again she is not smiling. The plate is simple, big and heavy. Is there an allegory to be found here? Of course there is.



Woodman and the Plate

What of it? Well, it may be tied to the powerful message that as you look at this picture, her lowered chin is the subtly one needs to forget about her ample and inviting breasts and to think about her and her heart.

And what of her fingers along the edge of the plate itself. To better understand what was going on I doffed my clothes, took up a plate of comparable size and stood before a mirror as she did and to my great amazement I found the plate became all but weightless. It was not been held against my body but the placement of the arms and their angles had a mystical effect on my body. It was a most remarkable realization. Here too, there is genius in this simple photograph! And the photograph itself is

timeless. If we had come across it as a Daguerreotype from the seventh decade of the 19th century, such a photograph would be as convincing as a one taken by Woodman of herself from the seventh decade of the 20th century.

Then there is Woodman and her three dresses, which point once again to coquetry, but not in a vulgar manner. This is made pronounced by her leggings which we have all seen at one point or another in time on the streets. This photograph will make you wonder what may be between what we can see of a woman wearing her leggings and what we cannot, except perhaps when her dress if hanging not on her shoulders, but instead on a peg on the wall.

Perhaps now is the time to return to the question … And what was I thinking when my friend asked me? I was thinking how fleeting is love and beauty. But I could not bring myself to voice those words. Instead I said to her, "I love you," and tears began to well in her eyes.

As I admired the Woodman photographs recently I must thank her … God I miss my Dorothea, and her soft tuft of hair, and the excitement of our youth.



Woodman – Three dresses

And what of Francesca and her lily? I said I would return to it.

Look closely at how and where her hand is placed, then consider the symbolism of the lily. Has your view of this photograph become more intense? I hope it has.

Much of her art has hidden meaning that you have to search for to truly understand. And what of Ms. Woodman herself?

In her simple black and white photography she speaks to us across more than three decades.

Francesca will never grow old. She will forever remain beautiful.

A Simple Picture

This simple picture holds a special place in my heart (a photograph by a French photographer in a Time-Life photography book from the 1970's).



Garcon et Fille, age neuf

You might think it because of its simple composition, or the simple dichotomy that is barely evident. It might be because of the poignant and gentle nature of the photograph or because of its simple artistry.

This simple work of art holds a special place in my heart merely because le garcon et la fille in this figurative photograph by the French photographer Jean-Francois Blauret are nine years old.

This lovely picture was taken in 1970, which is when I was nine years old, and well, there for the grace god I could very well be the boy in this lovely picture, and she could be one of my best friends of the day. I say this in the figurative sense and not the literal sense for the photograph was taken in France and I have yet to visit La Republique Francaise.

The age of nine is perhaps the perfect age. I confess I can't remember much of that time in my life, except for a few rather personal reminiscences, a few of which I will share shortly. At nine you are well along being a child, but no so well along that the distractions and complexities of puberty and adolescence have set in.

Boys and girls are at that stage in their lives are rather equal and not that unique unto themselves, apart from whether they are tall or big boned or awkward for some reason, which in my case was because of big feet, and ears that were set out in a rather elephantine fashion. Every so often I see a young boy who looks a bit like me when I was there age and seeing them does twig memories.

At that simple point in my simple life, in grade three, I had several girl friends who were that close to me, that had we posed for this picture we could be *sans habillement* as the French would say, and it would be just fine.

We could giggle and play and all was innocent. There was curiosity but it was purely childish.

At the age of nine the heaviness of the world has yet to settle upon our shoulders, as it would in just three or four more years when the pituitary gland kicks in and kicks starts the other glands that serve to differentiate the genders. At age nine we might speculate where babies came from, if only because we had younger siblings that sort of arrived in their rather spectacular ways. Slowly, ponderously and with that inevitability of expectant mothers becoming more and more expectant with the passage of nine full months.

We were growing up in the best of times. But as children some wanted to become adults, and quickly. I don't think I was one of them. The adult world did not intrigue me to the extent that I would have wanted to give up all the uncomplicated pleasures of my childhood, as well as the simplicity of my life.

My biggest responsibility at age nine was to make sure I made my bed up each morning, did my homework, and took a bath at least three times a week. I grew to enjoy baths and so it was more than twice a week. And being partly French Canadian, I didn't mind using lavender or rose scented soap.

I was teased about that by the boys in my class, some of whom constantly smelled like farm animals and thought that was a reason to be proud. It did not take me long to notice that the girls in my third grade class did not mind

my presence in their midst as much as they did the other boys. Perhaps it was the French soap?

Or maybe it was because I did my homework and like reading and enjoyed art. My mother had given me a Time-Life book about *Leonardo da Vinci* to read and I began to divide my time between science and art. In some sense my parents tugged me in two directions, my father the mechanical engineer encouraged my interest in math and science, and my mother the teacher who encouraged me to read and enjoy art.

I remember fondly some of the art projects we did in school, particularly the Thanksgiving turkey with the tail made from the tracing of our little hands and the multi-colour of the basic and earthy watercolours we had at school. For some reason the fall is my favorite time of year. Maybe it was the harvest, or the harvest feasting or the anticipation that Christmas and a new year was in the offing.

I have to admit I enjoyed the company of some of the girls in my class over those of the boys. And I did spend an unhealthy amount of time alone, reading in the library, or out in a quiet corner of the school yard. Sometimes I would be joined by a classmate of two, who usually sat with their legs tucked up under their dresses, or sometimes not tucked in at all. When they noticed I did not take issue in seeing frills, they let the frills be seen.

At this age you can hardly notice the physical difference unless you look closely. But the temperaments of boys and girls were indeed different. That was something I definitely noticed around that time. I was a shy little boy

with my big feet and big ears when I was nine and shy little boys are vulnerable and are picked on by other more aggressive children. Did you notice I said "*children*".

If you half expected me to end that sentence with the phrase "*aggressive boys*," you have not been all that observant when you were growing up, or perhaps now that you are an adult you have a prejudgment that needs to be reconsidered. Girls can be aggressive too. Children that age tend to be driven not by their nature, by their hormones for instance, but by their nurture and what they have picked up along the way, either at home or in the school yard or god forbid, elsewhere less familial. They also tend to mimic adults in some of their behavior.

When you are a shy little boy in elementary school you are picked on by more aggressive children. The nit-picking can be of a different nature whether it comes from other boys, or from the girls around you. Boys tend to be kinetic and physical in their aggression, while girls tend to be relational and emotional in their aggression. I received both, to the point of tears, because I was not merely shy, but I was a sensitive little boy too.

But back to the perfect age of nine. Three things happened at that age of my life that taught me a thing or two about the psychology of boys and girls, me being a sensitive and observant child and all when these lessons were being taught me. They were lessons in kindness and compassion.

i. The girls were kinder than the boys at school.
ii. The girls worked hard and did better at school.

iii. If I spent time with the girls, not only will they be my friends, but I will excel at school.

Would it surprise you to know that in my ninth year I was invited to almost all the birthday parties of my female classmates, and most times I was the only boy invited.

The other of the lessons are a story for another occasion …

A Fascinating Adventure

I hadn't talked with her for some time, for well over a month. I wondered what had come of her. But there she was hidden under the brim of her straw hat. I just stopped and quietly looked at her. She was a petite and sophisticated woman. I was just a young man. She sort of liked me, or that is what I imagined. She had always been kind and thoughtful to me. So I counted her among my free friends. I was a shy person and I sensed so was she in her own way. She was British, wise and well traveled and perhaps it was my shyness that saw her take a liking to me. Or perhaps it was my youthful naivety for I was not yet wise on the ways of the world.

You could feel the hot air rising off the pitch of the pavement. I could feel the heat through the soles of my shoes. It was unbearably hot. But there she was, hard at work in her garden, in the middle of the day. I smiled as I watched her. Her red hair escaped from under her hat and was being brushed about by the arid breeze.

Her roses had wilted in the summer sun, as if they hadn't been tended. Something must have been amiss. I had stopped at a discrete distance, watching her from the sidewalk, but somehow she sensed I was there. It was her sixth sense which I knew was quite evolved. Over the past two years I had grown to knew her as a librarian, but I had heard she had been a teacher before that, then an artist even earlier. She had travelled the world, and spent the best years of her youth in Paris in the 1930's. She was now newly retired, not by choice but by forced convention. I knew that left her

unhappy. Like a book she wanted to open a new chapter in her life, but perhaps did not know how.

It was rumored that she was exceptional in what she could perceive and observe. I should have not been surprised when she looked up in my direction, raised a hand to block the sun from her eyes and then squinted at me in the harshness of the sun. Only mad men and Englishwoman would be out on such a broiling August afternoon.

I admit I was a bit mad to be out in the sun that day without a hat or even sun glasses.. I had walked down to the library and was on my way back home. It was 1979 and I was freshly graduated from high school, and getting ready for university. She, on the other hand, was settled, retired and with her hat and all, perhaps didn't care about the sun or about life in general, for she was just a few steps away from her sanctuary from the world.

She stopped the tender ministrations she was giving her precious roses, set down the little red shovel and leaned back on her knees, pushing the front of her straw hat back with the back of her hand. She looked up at me and smiled. "Oh, hello."

I smiled and waved. She was genuinely happy to see me, and I had to admit so was I to see her.

She looked down at her roses and then shirked. "I've been away. I forgot about my roses." She held one of the wilted roses up but once she let it go it

fell back down. “My roses are barely alive, but with a bit of luck and the grace of god I might bring them back to life.” She lifted the wilted rose a second time and let it drop discouragingly. “It might in fact take a miracle.”

I shrugged my shoulders. It was a hot Saturday summer afternoon. I was wilting in the sun myself. I passed a hand over my forehead to wipe away some sweat. I could feel my perspiration soaking through my shirt.

She saw that I was carrying some books. “Been down to the library have you?”

I nodded.

Slowly she struggled to her feet. She wore a simple summer dress. She pulled the dress away from her body and smiled at me. Somehow I could tell that all she had on was the dress and nothing else. I had noticed before that for her age her figure was quite remarkable. I guess some woman age better than others. She was slim and light on top. I smiled as she walked towards me.

“You look thirsty.” I nodded. “It’s too hot for tea. Come let me make us some lemonade.”

I approached as she walked over and opened the wrought iron gate to let me in. Her garden was very English, and old school, just like her. The gate had an archway that was covered by wisteria. Walking through the gate felt like

I was entering a secret garden. She stood there taking off her gloves. I paused in the shade of the portal.

As I looked at her lovely home she turned to me and said that had lived in it most of her adult life, and odds are she would spend her last years there as well.

Her home was a little cottage, and was unique in the neighborhood. It was the only building made of stone, limestone in fact. I had heard that it had been built the previous century for some railway baron who liked to come to Lynn Valley to hunt for black tail deer. It was his summer hunting lodge. Rumor had it that the cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm of Imperial Germany had once lodged there in the summer of 1912, and that several famous authors had once spent time writing there when they visited British Columbia. Hers was an abode haunted by history.

She was lucky to live in such a charming place. But then again it reflected her charm. It fitted her as naturally as the cotton summer dress she wore, for here in her English garden with her limestone house she was in her element.

“Come,” she almost sang the word, as she smiled and beckoned me forward. She had invited me to visit a few times before as I walked by but on those occasions I had been bothered by other things or pressed for time. Besides, then it had not felt right. But today I felt it felt different. She was no longer a librarian but a person of a different sort. At this moment she seemed more fragile and more feminine.

I walked though the wrought iron gate, then paused for a few seconds to look about. Her garden was simple yet elegant. She led the way for both of us. As we both walked to the stairs I could sense the air becoming calmer and cooler the closer we got to the limestone of her house. There was something about ponderous rock that kept the hot out, or the cold in.

I walked slowly and deliberately to give her a chance to stay one step ahead me, to guide me up the limestone stairs into undiscovered country. My shadow cast over her for I was a good head taller than her. Our footsteps echoed off the side of her house, like a corner reflector would reflect light. Her steps were light and cadenced; mine were clumsy and out of synch. She took my arm more to guide me up the stairs then the other way around. We walked up the stairs arm in arm.

Her door was hidden from the street and painted bright red. This seemed odd to me in that the window frames were painted a dark green.

In the red door was a little peek-a-bout made of the same dark wrought iron of the fencing. The door handle was well kept polished brass and at least as old as the house itself. The door had been left ajar and so she merely pushed it with one finger and it swung open without a sound. It was made of solid hardwood and was as flat as the day it was milled. I was amazed by how silently and easily it moved. It was solid like the house was solid. As she walked through the front door it struck me as odd the contrast of her petiteness and the weightiness of the limestone.

As the door swung open she took off her sun glasses and looked up and over her shoulder at me and said, “don’t forget to take your shoes off.” Her eyes gleamed as she smiled. Out of the sun a good decade or two was taken off her age. I nodded and bent down to undo my shoes laces and take my shoes off. I set my books down next to my shoes.

As I kneeled beside her I could see the back of her and her legs there before me. On the back of her legs she had freckles that were barely perceivable. Her skin, even on her legs, appeared soft and young, and belied her age. She kicked her shoes off her feet and what then appeared were bare feet with carefully cared for toe nails painted in a soft lavender. As I stood up I glanced at her fingernails and then noticed they too were painted with the same colour. Her small hands appeared young, soft and supple.

I now stood beside her as she turned to face me, pulling a hat pin slowly and deliberately out and then carefully taking off her hat. In a sort of ritualistic motion she tossed her gloves outside onto the porch, set her hat onto a peg on the wall next to the door and then slowly pushing the door closed. I heard the door latch shut with a click behind me. My heart jumped with the unexpected click “That’s better” she said, as she led the way into her cottage.

I had not been wearing sun glasses and so I had to stop to get my directions. Although there was sunlight streaming in through the front window, it took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the dim interior. I turned to look out the front room window. The window had light lavender curtains that were ornate. They were tied open with woven lavender sashes. It took a few

second but eyes had by now adjusted to the dim interior and so I turned to survey her front room. She stood at the centre of the room watching me.

The front room had rustic furniture that seemed well at home in her cottage. There was nothing set down in front of the window. There was a wood fire place on the opposite wall. Next to the fireplace was a stack of kindling and logs. On the opposite side was a fixture holding the fireplace tools. To my right, opposite the fireplace were two Wright chairs and a large chesterfield in the Wright style. They appeared genuine and not cheap imitations. I pointed to them and she nodded "they are authentic." I frowned and nodded my head in approval. Beside one of the Wright chairs was a small table with a book on it and beside the small table a pedestal swing lamp in the same style. This was obviously where she sat to enjoy a good book.

In front of the chesterfield was a coffee table that had several art and literature books on it. A book, *Picasso: Forty Years of his Art*, published by the Museum of Modern Art in New York stood open. I glanced down at the book and she obviously sensed my confusion. "It was published in 1939. I picked it up when I visited the Picasso exhibit in New York that year. One of the paintings in this exhibit is of me!"

When she said this, it was that exact moment that I looked up and saw that her walls were adorned with a handful of paintings and pictures. Several of the paintings were in the Picasso style, one looked like it might be a Matisse. I walked over to the Matisse. It was an odalisque.

As I stood before the painting he voice rand clear and true. “That is me as well. I sat for that painting by Matisse. And for those by Picasso.”

I had walked over to the odalisque merely because it was the least erotic of the paintings on the wall. And now that she admitted that the figurative were of her I felt trapped to stand in front of the Matisse and not move. The Picasso paintings were somewhat risqué. They were erotic in nature and somewhat naughty.

She was now standing next to me as I admired the Matiise. “Picasso came for a visit one day when I was sitting for this painting and he insisted that Matisse share me with him. The following week I visited Picasso’s atelier …” I turned to look at her and then at the Picasso painting. She probably saw my irises widen.

“It was 1937 and I was in Paris studying art at the time. I was young and foolish them.” I did a mental calculation and guessed she was barely older than me at the time. She tugged at my arm and drew me in front of the nearest Picasso painting. I looked at her as she looked up at the painting. Her face and eyes glowed with an inner light.

“Sometime when I was not in class or at the Louvre sketching, if the day was bright, I would buy a bottle of red wine, a baguette and some sausage and sit in the sun. I would either read a book, or sketch the landscape. One day when I was sketching a couple picnicking in the park Picasso recognized me, snuck up behind me, saw what I was doing. We struck up a conversation.”

She turned to look at me and blushed as she continued. “By the middle of the afternoon I was standing on a pedestal in his studio … starkers … as he sketched me. He was between lovers and … being Picasso and all he had a way with woman … “ She turned back to the painting. He voice dropped to a whisper. “Can you keep a secret?”

“Yes …” I responded in a whisper.

“He preferred younger woman, girls almost.” She gathered her hands together in front of herself and pressed them against her thighs as she said this. “He was small … but what he could do with his hands and lips …” Now I understood what she meant by small. I stirred.

I looked at her, her curly red hair, her petiteness, and immediately understood what Matisse and Picasso would take such an interest in her.

“I was young and naïve … I guess I should have known better but when you are young and in Paris, well, you must have fun. It is a wonder I didn’t get pregnant!”

As she spoke nervously she gathered the front of her dress in her hand. As she did this, her dress crept up the side of her exposing more and more of her legs. She would have turned heads and stopped traffic as a young girl. They would have named ships after her and sailed for the distant and unconquered shores of Troy if only to be her lover.

There was an intimate silence. I held my breath and I could hear her breathing. Then she continued. "Henri was much more of a man, and far more gentler than Pablo." My heart skipped a beat when I realized she had not only had Picasso as a lover by Matisse as well. I let out my breath in a sigh.

She suddenly let go of her dress and turned to me. "Picasso was a brute … just like his Minotaurs." The light through the window shone through her dress outlining her figure. Yes, she had nothing on underneath the dress. Did she know I could see this? Was she toying with me?

"But you cannot understand can you?"I blushed and quickly glanced up at the painting. I could feel my face growing warm with blush.

"You have never had a lover have you." I could feel my face grow even warmer. "Just as I thought. She took my hand. "Follow me."

Trustingly I let her guide me.

She took me down a hallway to her bathroom and then set upon my shirt buttons. I stood passively as she undid my buttons. Then she turned to the bathtub and put the stopper in and began to pour water into it. It was a lovely stand alone bathtub with wrought iron feet in the shape of lion paws. The taps were vintage.

I understood what she planned to do and let her do what she pleased with me. Off came my shirt. As she unbuckled my belt I looked past her to the

mirror which stood over a white pedestal sink. My face was indeed bright red. The buckle came undone, and then she tugged and off came the pants and what was underneath. There was no subtlety here. I steadied myself as she then took to removing my pants and then my socks.

She stood up and there I stood starkers in front of her. She surveyed me as perhaps an artist would survey their model. She walked around me. "I will draw you. You will make a good artist model." There was a pause as I did not understand what was to happen next. "But first you need a bath. Get in," she said and so I got into the bath tub. Who was I to argue?

She handed me a small cloth and some lavender soap that had sat next to the tub and then stood up. "Let me get our lemonade." She picked up my things and carried them away, as if to trap me there, and left me alone in the bathtub. When the water had filled enough I turned off the taps. I did not want to fill the bath tub all that much, just enough to cover my legs. Unbelievably, I just sat there with the soap in one hand and the cloth in the other. The soap was lavender. I brought it to my nose and smelled its lovely perfume. Then I closed my eyes. Even today when I smell lavender I reminisce of this afternoon.

I heard a bird whistle outside and opened my eyes. When we had entered the bathroom she had not bothered to turn the light on for there was a small opened window near the top of the wall adjacent to the tub. Enough light streamed in the small window to make everything in the room visible.

As I looked up and out the window I wondered about what was happening outside, on the sidewalk and in the street. I wondered if anyone had watched us walk up the stairs, arm in arm, and into her house. I wondered about the many people who had visited her here in her unique cottage. I wondered how many fascinating adventures had played out here within the cold and immovable limestone.

A few minutes ago I was standing on the sidewalk. I trusted her and so here I now was amidst a fascinating adventure. A curious sensation gripped my stomach, part appetite and part apprehension. She was right, I have never had a lover. I knew nothing about the bird and the bees. Just standing in front of a painting of a nude female was enough to make me blush. And now look at where I was, naked in her bath tub. What would happen next to me, I wondered.

In the next room an old record began to play. I recognized the voice. It was Gille Becaud signing some vintage Parisian love songs. My French-Canadian aunt in Quebec had the same record and she had played it a number of times when I was visiting her and her family the previous summer. I listened to the sad words of the music, a lament of lost love, in French. Perhaps, like my aunt, she played this record to remember times past? Perhaps she was lonely, in an intimate sort of way.

She returned and stood at the door for a moment. “Are you doing fine?” she asked me.

I nodded. While she had already seen me, self consciously I placed the cloth over the best of me.

She approached the bathtub and handed me a glass of lemonade. Then she took a step back and sat on the water closet. She took a sip from her glass and glanced down at the cloth. "You are a shy one."

I gulped as I took a draft of the lemonade. The lemonade went down the wrong passageway and I began to cough. She quickly stood and patted my back until I stopped coughing. "You are a nervous one too."

I nodded a second time, this time more slowly and with a boyish grin.

"Don't be." She responded with a soft kindness. Then she took my glass of lemonade from me and placed both glasses of lemonade on the floor next to the tub.

She stood up and then reached down and pulled her dress off over her head. There she was nude in front of me, as she once was before Picasso or Matisse. I hadn't expected her to do this. But then again I hadn't expected her to do many of the things she had already done. I looked up at her. At that moment, in the soft light she looked half her age, and I must have looked like a child to her as I was half that more.

She just stood there as I admired her. She let me do that for a good ten seconds. I set my eyes on that delta that made her a Venus, covered with crimson curls, perhaps even more soft than the hair on her head. Behind the

soft cloud of red was an indescribable beauty and symmetry. The best of her looked like a strawberry covered in scarlet tresses. The view took my breath away. My arousal was nearly complete and she knew it. All she had to do was look down, for now it was all but impossible for me to hide it. I did not even try.

She kneeled next to the tub and took the cloth and soap from me. I covered myself with my two hands. As she worked soap into the cloth I looked up into her eyes. Her eyes bored deep into mine. Her irises were big pools of lusciousness. The little crinkles next to her eyes an honest rendering of the many times she had laughed and enjoyed life to its fullest. I could see myself reflected in her cornea. In the reflection I look so boyish and innocent. I felt so young and vulnerable.

Just as I noticed that she had put on lavender coloured lipstick she leaned forward and kissed me gently on the lips. It was as if she wanted to distract me for I felt the soapy cloth now returned from when it had come, but this time with her hand wrapping it firmly around me. When you are young you are easily stirred. She had aroused me. I felt self-conscious and so my hand moved across my body to discourage her but her hand guided me to her breast instead. She understood and so her arousal of me was tempered.

As a child we are all weaned at a woman's breast, but that is a memory that is barely remembered if at all by the time we are six or seven. I had once before seen a woman's breast when I happened to spy my mother through an almost closed door, dressing for a fancy dinner party. I glimpsed her for a

split second as I walked by my parent's bedroom. I was twelve at the time and my mother was in her thirties.

But today as I sat in the bath I saw breasts close up and hers were beautiful. I had never caressed a woman's breast before and so there was awkwardness to my touch. She understood this and released me from her kiss. She leaned forward to next to my ear and whispered "Gently ... you need to be gentle with a woman, unless she wants you to manhandle her …" I released my grasp but she brought my hand back. So I cupped her breast in my hand. With my other hand I gripped tightly to the edge of the bath tub.

I was piqued. "You need to be gentle with me too," I whispered into her ear. She looked at me, smiled and let go of me. She then stood to get into the tub. Ever so carefully she stepped over the edge of the tub. I looked up and admired much more of her. It is hard to really put into words what I saw and felt.

A flood of remembrance came over me. When I was five years old I once shared a bath with a girl my age who was a neighbor when I was struggling to recover from a bad case of asthma that had been brought on by freshly cut grass during an afternoon visit to her backyard. As I struggled to breath, her mother had picked me up off the ground and unceremoniously plunked me in the bath to cool me down and assuage my asthma. When her mother's back was turned, my friend had took it upon herself to doff her swimsuit and join me in the bath. As she stepped into the bath the fullness of her was revealed and my asthma was miraculously assuaged. It was delight over

coming discomfort – pleasure overpowering pain. We sat there, two innocents enjoying the pleasure.

As she got into the bath, for a split second nearly a decade and a half of my life left me and I was once again sharing a bath with my five year girlfriend. She got in and sat back in front of me. We fitted well together in this bathtub. My legs, bent at the knees, were perched on her hips. She leaned back and I could see her in a most private way. I was flabbergasted for here I was now ensconced in a rather private place enjoying a rather intimate moment in time.

She broke the silence in a rather revealing fashion. "After an afternoon of art Henri and I use to sit like this for hours on end. He was a very kind and thoughtful man. He was gentle and cultured. He had a wife and several children and so sex was not at the forefront of him … but we did make love from time to time. He understood. I guess I needed him more than he needed me. "

I whispered into her ear "and what about Picasso?"

She started to do something woefully unexpected. She started to laugh hysterically. This set the water in the bathtub into a watery tempest. "Ah, Pablo … I never sat in a bath with Pablo like this, he was not that kind of man. He was not sensuous like Matisse. He was rather crude and uncultured. I think this is why he is more popular than Matisse. People are generally crude and uncultured."

She turned to look me in my face before she continued. “All Pablo wanted to do with a woman was either to paint her in a sort of twisted and perverse way … or fuck her.” The f-word I had not expected from her lips, but it aroused me in a primitive way. I stirred and she felt it on the small of her back. She smiled. Maybe this is why she used the word.

She continued. “Pablo’s art was easy to understand, but when it came to sex, a women was nothing more than a fancy bottle to Picasso.” As she said this she placed her hand on her femininity. “… a receptacle. I soon tired of him, as he did of me.”

She looked deep into my eyes as she started to caress herself. “After a few weeks he had rubbed me raw.” I stirred again. She caressed herself and began to tremble.

She took my hand and guided me towards the best of her. I let her steer me. While I had set my eyes on such a wonder, I had never touched femininity before and this was all new and undiscovered country for me. She was soft and supple in an unexpected way. It was not what I expected and I flinched.

“What’s wrong?” she asked me with a start.

“I have never done this before.” This was a half truthful answer. I was surprised by her softness and litheness for I had expected old skin to be hard skin.

She giggle like a school girl.

“You are so soft.”

“I know. You weren’t expecting that at my age were you?”

“I don’t know really …” She guided me in. My fingers were exploring her. I unhurriedly touched her, little by little, bit by bit.

I don’t know why I did this but I asked her a dumb question “Have you had children?”

“That’s a silly question!”

“Umm, well … this is where babies come from …”

She giggled. “You are an odd one. No I haven’t.”

I felt ashamed asking her such a questions. I stopped.

Her hand was quick to cajole my fingers to once again explore. “None of my lovers have ever asked me such a question.”

My fingers stopped again moving when she said lover. I hadn’t thought of this but yes here we were sharing a moment of love together in her bath. I felt both very young and very vulnerable.

I think she understood why I had suddenly stopped. “We are now lovers …” she said. “After our bath you can sit for me and we shall do some art together.”

I slowly withdrew my hand.

“Can’t you tell whether I have had children?”

I shook my head. “How am I to know? I don’t know the first thing about life, love and lust.”

“You men are fixated in the vagina …” My heart skipped a beat when she had called me a man, while I considered myself still a boy, and not yet a man. My heart skipped another beat when she said the V-word.

“Huh …” She took my hand firmly in hers and guided my fingers towards le petit chapeau that crowned the best of her. “At least you distinguish love from lust …” She said “touch me here,” with some effort. What I felt beneath the little hat was like the tip of a small pendeloque, but far softer and more pliable.

It was magical for me. It was as petite and sensitive as my little finger. So I stroked her gently to begin with with the tip of my little finger. But her frantic hand told me she needed more. So now there were two fingers caressing her.

She became more and more frenzied. For me it was both primal and fascinating. She pressed my entire hand harder against herself and moved it frenetically back and forth, up and down and around in circles, first clockwise then counterclockwise. My hand was getting tired from all this manhandling. After three or four minutes of this, for how long I could not tell for time was standing still, I could feel my entire arm becoming fatigued and just when I was about to peter out and stop she halted my hand with a start. Her entire body tensed then spasmed uncontrollably.

I was alarmed and drew my hand away. "Are you ok?" I all but shouted into her ear. I didn't know better and thought she was having a stroke or something along that lines.

She struggled to say a few words. "that … was … incredible." I was still concerned for her, for her words were guttural and forced.

"What was?" I was still clueless. She could not speak but knew well enough to draw my hand back onto and into her sex.

She guided my hand as she caressed herself. "That … was … incredible …" she sighed a second time. "You … are … better … than … Matisse." There was silence. In the other room the record player played on. Becaud lamented about long lost love. Was she reminiscing about times long past.

It was then that I began to understand that her shudder was one of pleasure and not of pain. It was then that I noticed she was lavender all over and her body was alight. It was then that I noticed how much her breasts were erect

and her nipples too. It was then that I noticed the best of her was engorged and swelling with blood. Her furrow nearly snatched away my fingers. It was remarkable.

"That was the best orgasm I have had in a very long, long time." She turned and kissed me with her lavender lips, holding my head forward with her hand. We kissed so long that I began to wonder whether one or both of us would topple over for want of breath.

Then she let go and slumped against me in the bath. I could now feel the fullness of her exhaustion against me. "And how many times you have just walked me by …"

I smiled and thought perhaps I was foolish to be here, but I was here none the less and well, we had made love. Or at least I had made love to her. I guess that made me her lover. But what was she to become to me? She closed her eyes and what I saw reclining before me in the bath was a fragile and frail woman.

I watched her closely for several minutes. I could see her ribs through her skin and watched her chest rise and fall with each breath. I could see the fullness of her breasts abate and her nipples curl themselves back into their recesses. Then her breasts began to leisurely deflate and show their true age. They were small, almost coquettish, like she was. But, almost in defiance, her clitoris stood firm above her tresses. I felt compelled and so I took my little finger, rubbed some soap and water on it and took to caressing that little statue that stood atop her tuft of soft red hair.

I tickled the tip of her with my little finger, slowly, rhythmically and with purpose. She let out a sigh. "You are wonderful." I took great delight in this.

I had heard that while men are easily spent, woman could have more than one orgasm. She let out another sigh, then a third and a fourth. I watched as the little statue got redder and redder and then almost purple. I watched as the muscles on her abdomen grew more and more tense. Slowly and rhythmically I continued. "You're … driving … me … crazy!" He voice sounded so different and so far away.

I came close to her ear and whispered barely perceptively "that's … the … idea." I felt cocky and so I pinched her, just ever so lightly. She jumped. I grinned. I had complete sway over her. I went back to the slow, rhythmic caress. "I bet you had never done this with Matisse!"

"No …" she responded with languish, "… never." Without opening her eyes she smiled with a broad grin and leaned he head comfortably against my shoulder. She gripped the sides of the bath as she came a second time.

I slowly, rhythmically caressed her through several ever diminishing reverberations of her ardor, until she herself was well spent and had fallen asleep.

Six episodes of ardor was her limit. By then my fingers, my hand and the rest of me were quite exhausted as well.

I looked down at her, kissed her forehead, closed my eyes and then I too joined her in her repose.

Meeting Keiko for the First Time

I first met her by chance in the student union building at the University. I was on my way in for coffee, nothing more. She was sitting off in a corner balling her eyes out. I stopped and looked at her for a moment, then looked at my watch. There was a class in quantum electrodynamics I needed to attend in about fifteen minutes. So much for the coffee I thought as I turned and walked towards her.

As I approached her I could see she was small, and had dark hair. She wore a plain light grey blouse and a plain blue skirt with her sweater crumbled on her lap. Next to her was a stack of books and a binder sitting on the seat beside her. I stood before her and asked her quietly "are you ok?"

She was crouched over in a ball in a sort of seated fetal position. Muffled from within her hands came her plea, "no." She did not look up, nor uncover her face.

She sounded so inconsolable that I felt compelled to sit next to her. So I did. I guess it was the boy scout in me. Help this damsel in distress! "What's wrong … may I ask?"

"I am a fairure." The way she pronounced her r was more like an l so the word sounded more like "fairure."

"Don't cry". She didn't stop. So I used the magic word please."

Hesitantly her hands parted and slowly her face appeared. Her face was completely white and the corners of her mouth turned ever so slightly downward. Her's was the face of a Japanese doll with big black luscious eyes and a face that belonged atop a bright and colorful kimono. She was perhaps twenty at most.

"Has something happened?" I know, it was a stupid question to ask but somehow I needed to get her to open up. As I looked at the tears streaming down her cheeks I feared the worst. Maybe she had been assaulted and taken advantage of. She looked so fragile and vulnerable.

"Can I help you."

She shook her head side to side.

"Can I take you somewhere?"

"Where would you take me?" She looked at me surprised.

"To the hospital perhaps?" I earnestly showed my concern for her.

She looked at me quizzically. "Why would I need to go to the hospital?"

"Are you hurt? Has someone hurt you?" I put my hand on her shoulder. At that moment I think she understood my concern.

"Oh, no … it's not what you think."

I was relieved that it was not what I thought it might be. Then she smiled at me. I offered her my handkerchief to dry her eyes and she took it. When she dabbed her eyes dry some of her mascara was smudged on both her face and the hand\kerchief. She noticed this and suddenly looked at me. "I am sorry …".

We both looked down at the handkerchief. "That's ok," I said. "You can keep it."

She then smiled at me. "Why are you crying?" Well, by asking this question I knew that blew me arriving for my QED course on time. No matter, this little drama seemed more interesting.

"I just got a mid-term exam back." She had an earnest look on her face. I thought the worst of it.

"Did you fail?" To my surprise she shook her head, instead of nodding. What did you get?"

"A sixty-five."

"That's not that bad of a mark." She looked at me with eyes that were now much warmer.

"You think so?" I nodded. She sniffled. "I had hoped for a higher mark.

“What was the class?” I was curious now.

“Finance …” Well being a science type I knew immediately I was in undiscovered country.

“What program are you in?”

“Commerce … first year.” I nodded sympathetically, then I sighed and she sighed too, at the very same instance.

The ice had been broken. I glanced at my watch and she noticed this. She also noticed the wedding ring on my finger, but somehow she made it looked like she had not seen it by tilting her head ever so slightly away as she looked. Only a Japanese woman could do that with such conviction. With her poise and body language she was saying that if it didn’t bother me, it would not bother her.

“Do you have to go?” She looked at me with eyes that pleaded she not be left to herself. I knew I should be in class, but I felt it was best I not leave just yet. I shook my head and smiled at the same time.

She grinned back, with a knowing smile. She showed some teeth and licked her lips slowly and nervously.

We sort of understood each other. “Where are you from?” I already knew, somewhere in Japan.

She confirmed it. “Tokyo …”

“Been here long?” It was a throw away question, for it was sort of obvious she was here to go to university and the term had just started six weeks back, on the fifth of September.

“No …”

“Why are so upset about your exam mark?”

“Well … ,” she took a few seconds to compose herself before continuing. “My professor said to me at the end of class that if this is the mark on his first exam, I can only expect lower marks in the other exams. He said I won’t pass the class.”

“So what …”

“Well …” this time her hesitation had an edge to it. “This is the highest mark I have gotten so far. I did worst in all my other exams.”

“Did you pass your other exams?”

She nodded. At that moment she went silent and I just looked at her. The color had come back to her cheeks and the corners of her mouth were no longer turned down.

I offered her my hand. “My name is Patrick.”

She offered hers in return. The only holding the handkerchief. We both stopped at the last split second and she giggled. "Sorry …" She passed the handkerchief to her other hand and then we shook hands.

Her hand was soft and small. "My name is Keiko."

"What a lovely name," I responded.

"It means beautiful child."

I smiled, and before I could catch myself I said "you are very beautiful."

Her face blushed in a full and honest way. She was so embarrassed that she covered her face again with her hands.

It was my turn to apologize. "I am sorry … I did not mean to embarrass you."

She looked up at me with a start. Her eyes were sparkling. "I need to go for a minute … but I will be back." She reached over and touched my hand. "Will you wait for me here?" She stood up taking her sweater with her.

I nodded and off she dashed to the washroom. She was indeed very small. Perhaps a head and a half shorter than me and a good half my weight. She was light on her feet and very graceful. She walked with small measured

stepped, perhaps taught her by growing up wearing kimono. Or at least I thought as much.

No one walking across her path took notice of her as she deftly navigated the busy corridor. When she got to the door of the washroom, then and only then did she stop to look back, for I suspect she feared I would not wait for her. She gazed back at me and even from across the busy hallway the warmth of her smile touched my heart. I waved at her and she waved back.

It was only about a minute and a half, far too little time to do anything else but freshen up before the door opened and Keiko reappeared. She had not gone to spend a penny. As she walked towards me I could see that she had removed the last of her mascara and wiped away the smudges. She had put on her sweater.
As she walked towards me the twin shadows that were cast on her by the overhead lights were barely perceptible. Now she seemed even younger without her make-up. And more fragile.

When she got close to me I half expected her to sit right down but she stayed standing. "You're still here." Her words sounded more pleasing, that surprised. She reached down and picked up her things.

"Yes I am." I looked up at her and smile, "I said I would be." Again I half expected her to sit but still she remained standing. She offered me her hand. I looked at it for a few seconds and then took it and she lifted me from my seat with a light and graceful sweep of her hand. Perhaps this was the point

of no return, or maybe it came later. As I think back I am not so sure when it was.

"Let us go for a wark," she said, again replacing the l with an r. She held onto my hand. There was something both cute and magical in this gesture. Her hand was warm and mine grew warmer in response. She had taken hold of my left hand. The one with my wedding ring, but she covered it with her lovely hand. It was then that I noticed that the pink of her fingernails was in fact nothing but clear nail polish.

"Yes … let's" I felt strangely at home and at ease standing beside this beautiful woman who moments before had been a perfect stranger. There was a gracefulness to her that set me at ease.

I walked with a slow and measured gait to accommodate her short steps. It sort of threw me off my usual balance and so I had to concentrate more than usual as we walked. This meant she not only chose our pace, but the way we walked as well.

"Where are we going?" I asked her.

She looked up at me and smiled, "somewhere very special."

I sensed an intent to her words and wondered where and what this 'special place meant.' So I asked again. "Where are we going?'

All she said in response was "you'rr see." I smiled. The l's again.

We walked out of the student union building and up the boulevard past throngs of students. I was nervous, being uncertain as to what might be happening, and when I am nervous I feel compelled to speak.

“Do you miss home?”

“Yes …”

“Much?”

“Yes … very.” She was very reticent. I wondered why.

“Do you miss your family?

“Yes, of course.”

“Do you have friends here?” I was naïve and didn’t mean anything by this but as I look back perhaps this was another point of no return.

“No … not many.”

“No classmates.”

“No …”

“No dorm mates?”

"I don't live in a dorm." On we continued to this 'special place' she was taking me. I was relieved, to say the least, that this would not be a dorm room. After all, I am a married man.

As we got closer it dawned on me where she was taking us. Of, course! She was taking us to the Japanese Botanical Garden. Now this was exotic. I had never been to the gardens. Never really had I a reason to visit them.

Her gait sped up, as if she could read my thoughts. But something else happened. Something that was barely perceptible at first. Her gait began to include a decided seductive sway of her hips. And there was now a slight tilt to her head, a tilt towards me.

When we arrived at the kiosk at the gate to the garden, there was an old Japanese lady behind the counter. Keiko said something polite to her and she waved us into the garden.

When we stepped into the garden something magical seemed to happen for Keiko took my arm and drew me close and whispered "isn't it beautiful?"

I looked first at her then up at the garden. She was pressed so close to me that I could feel her breast on my arm. I looked back down at her before responding. "Yes … beautiful …"

We walked quietly through the garden. I sensed we had the garden all to ourselves. There was a lovely pond in the centre of the garden with a little

wooden bridge that took us to a small tea house that opened onto the pond. As we crossed the bride I noticed the old woman at the door to the garden. Keiko stopped and bowed to her and the old woman bowed back and then the door swing shut.

"The garden is closed?" I asked.

"I told her we would not be long …"

Now we were shut in, just the two of us. We walked to the tea hose and sat down beside each other. We looked across the water. I was very nervous but fought the urge to speak. I did not want to ruin this magical moment. She was still holding my hand.

She broke the silence. "It is my birthday …."

I turned to her as she did to me and I smiled. "Happy birthday." I looked at her face. She closed her eyes and said "and my boy friend dumped me". A tiny tear appeared. Her lips trembled.

"How do you feel?"

"I thought I would be alone on my birthday."

I reached up and with my finger wiped away the tear. "You're not." Then she started to cry and so I leaned over and hugged her as a brother would hug a sister. It seemed to be the right thing to do.

Then she hugged me, so tightly I could feel her breasts against my body. We were like this for a minute or two until she stopped crying. Then we parted just a few inches and she turned her face to me.

Her eyes were enticing and beseeching. Once again she licked her lips. We both understood, we leaned forward and kissed. Keiko wrapped her arms around my neck and, well I will admit this was the most remarkably passionate kiss I had ever experienced. She rocked her lips back and forth across mine and her entire body swayed in unison.

I could feel the warmth of her through her sweater. Before I could stop her, she took my hand and was guiding it up her dress. I could feel the softness of her panties against the tips of my fingers. I obliged her by tickling the best of her.

I just tickled – nothing more.

Her kiss became less ardent, as if an inner tension had been freed and her thighs rubbed the side of my hand. She let out a groan and so my tickling became a mere flicker of my fingers. Her thighs opened up for me and she leaned herself forward. So now I just massaged her slowly and in a teasing way, with my two outer fingers sweeping up first then my middle finger. It was having its affect.

My fingers were getting very wet and her thighs began a slow and building shudder. She pulled her thighs further and further apart.

“Please …” she groaned. But I did not want to complicate matters much further. I took her hand and guided it to where my hand was poised and then drew aside her panties. And well, I am convinced that a woman can please herself much better than a man can. It was humbling to me to see how she knew herself so well.

I watched her face as her climax built. Her body began a succession of spasms that grew with intensity. Even the boards under us began to shudder. The sound carried across the water, as did her groans. I kissed her to drown out her moans.

As Keiko climaxed it was the most remarkable affair I had ever experienced. My hand was trapped with hers between her thighs and the squeeze was unexpected, drawing my fingers within her.

What she did next was astonishing. She merely moved by a millimeter or two back and forth across my finger tips, and shuddered and shuddered and shuddered. Her climax went on for a good four of five minutes.

And as she enjoyed the sensation, as a man I felt humbled by the remarkableness of what I was experiencing close at hand.

Then she collapsed in my arms and started to cry. “I am so happy. Thank you.”

I kissed Keiko on her cheek. I could taste the salt of her tears.

“Happy birthday …” was all that I could think to say in return.

Toast and Strawberries

It was a Sunday morning around 8 when she telephoned. I could tell by the softness and the hesitation in her voice that something was amiss. Please come … "she pleaded. I said I would.

So I wrote a little note and left it on the kitchen table, "going for a walk to Lynn Canyon Park and will be back around noon" and then stealthily went on my way.

I walked to her place, leaving the car. It was only a fifteen minute walk. When I arrived I knocked on the door. She opened it. I could tell she had been crying. She was still dressed in her night outfit, which surprised me.

"I am so glad you came," she said as she swung the door closed behind me. "It was awful!" Then she gave me a hug. She had not hugged me before and I could feel her through the night dress.

I had been tutoring her math and physics for two years. Now she was just a few days away from graduating. I knew her graduation dance had been the night before. Something had obviously happened.

"Where's your dad?" She had only one parent, for her mother had drowned the year before in an accident.

"Oh … he's gone to a wedding for the day."

“Didn’t you want to go too? I thought girls like weddings.”

“No … I didn’t. I feel bad enough, and don’t need to be reminded …” She let the rest of the sentence slide for we both knew what she meant to say. I knew what she meant to say was that she didn’t need to be reminded that my mother was gone.

She led the way up the stairs. I followed her. She was not being modest this morning with me. I looked away. The cut of the gown was high and she wore nothing underneath. When we got to the top of the stairs I said “shouldn’t you get dressed or something?”

She acted as if she hadn’t heard me. Oh well.

“So tell me … what was awful?”

She stopped and turned to face me. “Last night my date ditched me at the graduation dance. I had to walk home in the rain. I ruined my dress.” She sniffled as she said this. “And I think I am catching a cold.”

“You must be cold. Why don’t you at least put on a robe and slippers.” She nodded and disappeared up the next flight of stairs. I walked over to the kitchen, which was across the living room. She lived in a split level rancher with a lofty living room. It was a sunny morning and the sun streamed into the middle of the living room. The kitchen was clean and well organized.

I looked out the back window at the yard. It was a bright May morning. The flowers were in bloom. I turned around and looked around the living room. It too was clean and organized. In actual fact the house always seemed in perfect order. Here was a family that took pride in their lives.

I was standing to my back to the stove when she reappeared. She had a pink robe on and pink bunny rabbit slippers. I smiled. She was wrapping herself in her robe. As she got closer to me I looked down at her slippers and started to laugh. "They are all you." The slippers were pink bunny rabbits with ears that flopped back and forth as she walked.

"They were a birthday gift from my ..." She stopped herself before she could say mother. She gave me another hug. I let her hold onto me for as long as she wished. I could tell she was very lonely.

She looked up at me and smiled. "Feeling better?" I asked her.

"A bit … thanks for asking." She let go and stood beside me.

"Have you had breakfast?"

She shook her head. I smiled at her then turned to face the stove. "So what will it be?"

"You'll make me breakfast?" She was surprised.

I nodded. "How about eggs and toast?"

“Poached them will you … a girl has got to look after her figure.” As she said this she pulled her robe close to her body.

I smiled as she said this for she was slim and petite, and hardly needed to worry about her figure. “Poached it is then. How many?”

“Two for me … and you? She placed her hands at the edge of the counter and pushed herself away from the counter top with her arms.

“I have already had breakfast … but I could do with a good cup of coffee.”

She sprung into action, opened a cabinet, extracted a cup and walked over to the coffee machine. I watched the ears flop back and forth.Taking the carafe from the machine she began to slowly and carefully pour a cup of coffee for me. “You don’t drink coffee do you?” I asked her.

“No, I never touch the stuff. It tastes horrible.” She made a face as she said this.

“Chaqune a sont gout” I responded.

“Huh?”

“Each to their own taste.”

“Exactly!” She giggled as she handed me my cup of coffee. “I will stick to my orange juice.”

I took a sip of the coffee.

“Is it good?”

It was still quite hot and must have been made recently. It was a bit bitter but I fought the urge to add something to it.

I must of made a bit of a face because she asked “no cream or sugar?” I shook my head.

“It’s fine.”

“My father just left before you arrived. You missed him by five minutes. He just made himself some coffee this morning before he dashed out the door. He’ll be gone for most of the day.”

I nodded. She walked over to the refrigerator ad opened the door, extracting a dozen eggs. I grabbed for a pan hanging over the stove and began to fill the pan with cold water. “Any vinegar?”

“Vinegar? What do you need that for?”

“You always put a dash of vinegar in with the water when you poach eggs.”

“Really? Why?” She walked over and set the dozen eggs down on the counter next to the stove.

“Damned if I know.” She had a point. Why? I shrugged my shoulders. I placed the pan on the stove as she looked down in one of the cupboards for some vinegar. She found some red wine vinegar and placed it next to the stove.

“I guess that will have to do,” she said.

“Oeufs a la Parisienne. It will give the poached eggs a rich European taste.” I opened the egg container. There were four eggs in the carton. “On second thought I think I will have two as well.”

We let the water heat for a few minutes and talked some more. “What happened at your graduation dance?”

She looked down and paused. “I don’t know where to begin.”

“Well … we have lot’s of time. Why don’t you begin at the beginning?”

She looked up at me and I could sense the pain that she felt. She could not form the first word so I did.

“Did he ask you to go to the dance with you?”

“Well … sort of.”

“Is he your boyfriend?” That question set he off. It was like lighting the fuse on a stick of dynamite.

“Noooo … heaven forbid.” I had heard her mother say this expression from time to time. “I don’t have a boy friend!”

“You don’t! I am surprise, a pretty girl like you.” I did not say this to tease her but to encourage her. I knew she was shy and introverted. But I was when I was he age, and well, even I had a ‘girlfriend’ when I was in high school. “Do you have friends who are boys?”

She paused and gave me a funny look. “I have you …”. When she said that I turned back to the water in the pan that had begun to boil.

“I guess you do.” I poured some of the red wine vinegar into the boiling water and the room immediately began to smell of the vinegar. Then I reached for a wooden spoon and started to stir the water round.

“What are you doing?”

“Watch …” I grabbed an egg and cracked it into the swirling water. Then I quickly grabbed a second. Before the third egg I needed to give the water another stir. In two blinks of an eye the four eggs were in the boiling water. I turned down the heat and covered the pan. “That should do it … want to make the toast?”

She grinned and dashed to the fridge to get the bread and popped two pieces into the toaster. Then she returned to the fridge to get the butter and strawberry jam. She set the butter and the jam on the table.

"Soft or hard?"

"Huh?"She looked up at me with a puzzled expression.

"The eggs …silly." I chortled.

"Oh …" she peered over at the steam drifting up from the pan. "Soft is fine."

Then she poured herself a glass of orange juice and set two places out at the table. By the time she had done all this, the eggs were poached and ready to be enjoyed.

"Bring me the plates." She obliged and I took a slotted spoon and lifted the first egg carefully out of the pan, letting water drip off of it for few seconds. Then I did the same with a second egg. Almost on queue the toaster popped and out appeared two perfectly toasted pieces of bread. "Those are yours," I said handing her the plate. She gave me the second, empty plate, walked over to the toaster and retrieved her two pieces.

As she shuffled over the ears on her bunnies flopped back and forth in a breakfast dance. She plunked two new pieces of bread into the toaster, latched it down and then went to her place at the table and set her plate down. "Go ahead and eat before your eggs get cold."

“I will wait for you.”

“You can, can you.” She nodded. There was a sweetness to her disposition that made her special. She did not have a selfish bone in her body. At least that is what I thought since she was never selfish when I was around her. She was always kind and considerate to me. Is anyone so perfect?

I slotted the remaining two eggs on my plate, turned the element off and carefully lifted the pan onto a cold element.

“What are you doing?”

“Oh …” I looked back and realized what she was asking. “Sort of a double safety thing.”

“Double safety?”

“If I forget and leave it on the element the water will boil off. That’s not good. If I forget to turn the element off and yet moved the pan to a cold element, then all I am doing is heating the room. You see, I am awfully absent minded.”

“I have noticed,” she smiled a toothy smile “that you are absent minded.”

I walked to the table, set down my plate and sat next to her. “Go ahead, don’t wait. I will wait for my toast.”

She spread a little measure of butter on her toast and then a thick layer of strawberry jam. I watched as she spread the jam carefully, covering almost all of the top of her toast with the jam. I felt this was an intimate look into her psyche.

The toaster popped and we both jumped. I looked at her in surprise and she did me and she began to giggle. "I can see you are feeling much better."

"Whenever I am with you I am happy."

Of course this begged the question. "And when you're not?"

"I depends."

"On what?" She took a bite from her toast. She hadn't yet even touched her eggs.

"On who I am with, and what it is we are doing." She set the toast down on the corner of her plate.

"Like yesterday." I studied her face. Her face became stern and serious.

"Yes, like yesterday."

"What happened?" I picked up a piece of toast and began to butter so that it appeared I was taking a casual notice of what we were talking about. In fact

my ears were piqued on each nuance of both what she was saying and the words she was using.

“He picked me up. Well sort of, I was the fourth in a car with his best friend, his best friend’s girlfriend and him. The trouble was …” she stopped cold.

I put some jam onto my toast and slowly spread the strawberry around. I did not look up at her for fear my gaze would rob her of her courage.

“The trouble was his best friend’s girlfriend is my worst femeny …”

I looked up with a start. She had used a word I had never heard before but whose meaning I could assume by context. But I felt it best, to keep her talking, to ask her. “What’s a femeny?”

She smirked. “It’s the worst form of enemy a girl can have … another girl. It’s a female enemy … a femeny.”

I nodded understanding.

“From the moment my date picked me up to the moment he bailed, she was at me. First, why we had kept them waiting when they came to pick me up. If I knew she was there in the car I would have gotten my father to drive me to the dance to the dance, but my date did not tell me.”

“That sounds ominous!” I took a piece of egg and lifted it to my mouth. “You should have your breakfast as we eat.” I said this thinking it would take the edge off what we were talking about.

She looked down at her eggs and then pushed the plate away from herself. “I am not hungry.”

“At least eat the toast.” I pushed her plate back towards her.

She picked up the piece of toast she had already eating and nibbled on it. I took the second piece of bread off my plate, buttered it and put a heavy layer of strawberry jam on it and then placed it on her plate. “For strength,” I said.

“What happened next?”

“My dress was much better then hers. She’s well …”

I looked at her with concern.

She set down her toast and took her hands under her petite bosom and pulled them up. I smirked my understanding.

“You know you are perfect. Just because she has big breasts doesn’t make her a better girl.”

“Tell that to my date and his best friend! They acted like jerks towards me. ”

“No!”

“Yup, and she was edging him on. She had plenty of cleavage showing and even let the two of them touch the top of her breast.”

“No! And what did they do?”

“They went ahead and well she had them wrapped around her little finger in no time. My date even tried to put his hand down the front of my dress to check me out!”

I shook my head. “What a jerk. It’s good you dumped him. What didn’t you stay for the dance?”

“I couldn’t! I just couldn’t. Especially after …”

“After what?”

“She walked into the dance with her date on one arm and mine on the other. So I just ran home.”

I remembered that it was raining cats and dogs last night. “That’s rough. Poor you!” I reached across the table and touched her hand. It was very warm.

“When I got home I was glad my dad had gone out. He doesn’t know that my date bailed. If he did he would wring his neck for sure, but I don’t ever want to see or talk to him again. You won’t tell him will you?”

I shook my head. “Can’t blame you for coming home.” She was now holding back her tears. “Now now, don’t cry.” But my words had the opposite effect. They opened the flood gates and she began to cry.

“Do you think I have small breasts?” her words came out chocked.

My jaw dropped. “Ummm …” I was dumbfounded. I hadn’t expected her to ask me such a loaded question. I raised my eyebrows, “ummm…” I didn’t know what to say. It was a no win situation. “I have never ….”

Before the next word left my mouth she had opened her robe and dropped it off her shoulders and there they were. I quickly covered my eyes with my hands, dropping a piece of toast on the table, but not before I caught a glimpse of her.

“See … even you don’t want to see what I look like!”

“It’s not that. It’s well, sort of awkward what we are doing.” I let my hand drop and there she sat with tears streaming down her face onto her two breasts. There she sat both proud and defiant. They were pink and even from across the table I could tell her breasts were soft and virginal. “You are very beautiful. ”

“You don’t think they are too small?” She lifted them up with her hands.

I looked down at her. My mouth was suddenly dry. I reached over for my coffee and took a swig. “They are perfect for your size.” I set the cup down, nearly knocking it over. She was no longer so tearful “Can I ask you something?

“Yes.”

“The other girl, is she slim like you or over weight?”

“Over weight.”

“Humph, well that explains it... what do you think a breast is?”

She looked down at herself, then looked up. “I don’t know. You tell me.”

“It is fatty tissue. Big breasts on a woman means she has plenty of body fat.” I know it was a bit of a white lie, but the circumstances warranted it.

“I hadn’t thought of it that way.” She let down her hands. Her nipples had by now become prominent and the areole was very much alive from her touch.

“You are athletic and in very good health. There are many women with big breasts who would be envious of you.”

“They would?” She leaned back in her chair. Her breasts giggled just a bit as she moved about.

“You know they get tired to carry the girls about, and they have sore shoulders and stiff necks. And they worry about cysts and god knows what else.”

She smiled.

I leaned forward and placed my elbows on the table and placed my head in my hands. “Do you know why god created women’s breasts?”

“To feed babies …”

“Well, yes. That’s a given. But I think the real reason why God created women’s breasts … was to make men envious.”

She giggled, placing her hand across herself as she jiggled.

“You know something …” She took up the arms of her robe and put her pink robe back across her shoulders. Then she hugged herself. I handed her my handkerchief. She dried her eyes.

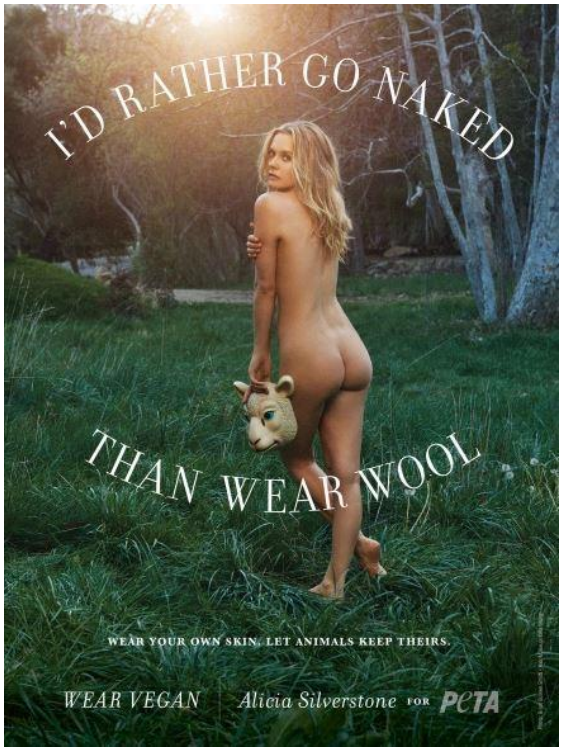
“What?”

She lifted a piece of toast to her mouth and savored the strawberry. Then she licked her lips before she spoke. “I love you.”

I took up a piece of my toast, leaned back and smiled. “I know.”

Making an Ass of Herself

I have to say that in her anti-wool campaign Alicia Silverstone is making a bit of an ass of herself, both literally and figuratively. Perhaps she sees herself as Eve in Eden? It is hard to understand what is behind her thoughts.



Alicia Silverstone (PETA)

You have to wonder how ashamed her mother must be with her, but not because of her figurative nature mind you. A mother would never be ashamed of a beautiful daughter. She might be ashamed of what her daughter does with her beauty though. Saying she won't wear wool is a bit of a sham!

Ms. Silverstone's poster is probably more pornographic than truly PETA. Of course I mean *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*. Frankly, I don't know anyone who ascribes to the notion that shearing wool off a sheep causes the sheep any harm what so ever. It's not like killing an animal and producing fur or leather from its dead carcass. That is really what PETA is about.

It is hard not to think that behind her mooning the audience, there is narcissism and arrogance in Alicia Silverstone's asinine behavior – *look at me, I am Vegan*. Her bare backside says she wants to be noticed, which for a film star is meant to be reflected in more ticket sales and more money in the bank for her and backers.

We see this with other actresses. As if having to endure the antics of the Kardashians isn't enough. There is an endless baring of this that and another bit or piece and the endless grab for headlines.

Kim Kardashian's Paper spread sort of says it all.



Alicia Silverstone's is not the first, nor the last pretty actress who will bare herself for publicity, and god knows there have been many before her; Louise Brooks, from the silent film era, for instance



Louise Brooks (1920's)

As an artist I believe this to be one of the most beautiful photographs of the 20th century. It was taken a hundred years before Silverstone's ascent to the screen. The composition within this photograph goes right down to the pose of her hands, the expensive shoes, the flapper hair cut, her very feminine breasts and mysterious and barely perceived Delta of Venus. The soft lighting assimilates every detail together into a remarkable and memorable artistic study.

This Louise Brooke photograph, which is one of many, is soothingly assuasive – we know her to be beautiful just by the realities of what we see of her in the piece.

Ms. Brookes projects a presence that very few actresses could aspire to, even imagine. She is proud of herself and is not afraid to show it. There is no false modesty and no falseness to Louise Brooke at all. She doesn't have her backside turned to the camera – she is all in. Now I admit I do not know much of the life and times of Louise Brooke, although such a remarkable photograph asks me – why not? Silverstone is a child compared to the likes of Brooke.

We could of course mention many other film stars, but just in passing mind you. For instance, the actress who sang President Jack Kennedy Happy Birthday – Marilyn Monroe.

She has become a mythical and tragic figure and so I shall just chose a simple example from a rather large repertoire of cheesecake photos of her. I don't know when this picture was taken but she appears to be young and happy so it must have been taken in the early part of her career – she might have been struggling, or possibly needing to pay her rent or electricity bill.

You might notice the tan lines and sense the spontaneity in the photo. The photograph was probably taken by a camera club amateur and done on the spur on the moment in their living room with the props that were at hand.

Both the subject and the photographer are enjoying the moment immensely. This photograph is pure beauty.



Marilyn Monroe (1940)

In this photograph Marilyn Monroe is about Silverstone's age but differs in her joyfulness and her reality. Here too, Silverstone is an amateur compared to the likes of Marilyn Monroe.

Then there was the famous or infamous Betty Page who was an idol to film and photography buffs in the 1940's and 1950's. She had this girl next door nature to her that made her very popular in photographic circles.



Betty Page (1950)

Yes, Betty Page was a complicated person with a complicated life, but you don't see that in *her* photographs, and they are *her* photographs for she is very much in *her* element and very much on top of things.

If you are going to share your assets with the world, Betty Page did that with an understanding of what the female figure is all about. In this photograph she knew what she was doing and so this photograph is a superb rendering of her musculature and her feminine hips. In comparison, here too Silverstone is a child.

A few years back, in 2005, a film was made titled *The Notorious Betty Page* starring a contemporary actress, Gretchen Moll. In that film there is the unforgettable New York Camera club scene that titillated audiences.



Gretchen Moll (2005)

Ms. Moll got into her Betty Page part so well. She also played Catherine Caswell in the film 2008 film ***American Affair*** which relates to another illicit love affair involving JFK.

I admit I am a great fan of Brigitte Bardot, but then again I am a fan of French film in general. There are famous scenes in some of the Vadim films

from the 1960's that are cheeky. Bardot is the real thing – the beautiful woman that only God could have created.



Brigitte Bardot (1960)

There is one of the most famous moments in French films when behind a dreamy glass front Bardot dances an enticing dance which changed film forever! Boy were tickets sold for that film!



Brigitte Bardot (1960)

While she is hardly worthy the comparison, here too, Silverstone is a child compared to the likes of Bardot.

But this is about film. These are stories, some real and some make believe, that have a figurative edge to them. With Brook, Monroe, Page or Bardot here is no pretext, no falsity. It's beauty, pure and simple. And there is no narcissism.

There are many wonderful and simple pictures by artists about Eve in Eden that we might stop to consider as we ponder Alicia Silverstone's bare dash through Eden. There is Duchamp's Adam and Eve,



Duchamp – Adam & Eve (1930)

Then there are two more recent revisits to the theme, one from 1967 and the second from 2016.

The piece Duchamp-Relaché by Rauschenberg & Sturtevant from 1967 is rather wonderful. Eve is not so timid, and in fact smiles at Adam.



Duchamp-Relaché, Rauschenberg & Sturtevant (1967)

This is such a wonderful photograph. Can you sense what makes it wonderful (look at Ms. Sturtevant). You probably hardly notice Rauschenberg.

The recent version of Adam and Eve appeared in a magazine just this past month.



Abramovic – Adam & Eve (2016)

I love the fig leaf, but I can't relate to the snakes. Eve is a bit over the top. Maybe Ms. Abramovic might revisit the theme *sans les serpents*.

Well, I guess Ms. Silverstone isn't really anything like an Eve after all. There is no life in her. And if there is no life then the whole poster thing lacks heart.

It is hard to ascertain what Alicia is driving at in her PETA aspirations, for wool is not like fur or leather. No sheep is killed when they are sheared and

if you have ever watched sheep being sheared, you could almost see their smiles after the cut.

Wool is to sheep what hair is to people. We cut our hair – is that an inhuman treatment? We try to keep it short during the summers and long during the colder seasons of the year. If you ever have been around sheep in the summer you must feel sorry for the poor animals. Wool is a very good insulator and these poor, if they are not sheared of their wool in the summer, suffer terribly.

As a Canadian I wear a Harris Tweed jacket and I doubt the sheep in Scotland mind. In the winter I love to wear a wool overcoat because it is natural and is rather good at keeping me warm. And I have a wool scarf to boot. I don't live in balmy California and can't wear shorts in December like Alicia Silverstone. Life does not sound too tough for her. But ask a Canadian about mid-winter!

I have to admit I have had some fun in working with artists. I have sat for allegorical pieces.

The first photograph is titled *The Allegory of the Apples*, which relates to the half-eaten fruit. Can you figure how the apples figure into the parable?



The Allegory of theApples (2005)

When they ask I sit for my artist friends from time to time. There are at least three good reasons why I do this. It helps my artists friends with their art praxis. It helps me deal with my chronic pain (if you have ever sat as an artist's model you know the feeling – the endorphins flooding your body. The only way of overcoming debilitating pain is with pleasure.) And third, the artworks they produce are superb and will, no doubt, outlive me.

Most of the artwork are sketches, but some art is photographs. This Odalisque was taken by an artist friend just prior to her going abroad to art school to complete a Masters. It inspired her in some of her painting (in fact I think she promised me a painting from that series).



Odalisque (2007)

Over the past decade I have leaned up a bit, taking to walking more and more. When I now sit for artists I am now compared to Michelangelo's David.

When I saw Silverstone's PETA anti-wool poster for the first time the first thing I noticed was not her backside, it was the perceivable pastiness or pallor that she, as an unhealthy person, has. You can see it in her eyes and her face. Hers are not warm or wholesome eyes. Hers are not the joyful, remarkable and exuberant eyes of Bridget Bardot.

Besides Silverstone is as unreal as her blonde hair, which appears to have come out of a bottle. In her poster her hair appears stringy, unkempt and unhealthy.

The true measure of whether Alicia is in fact healthy would be if she turned around and we saw that her breasts had the plumpness and roundness of a healthy woman her age, or whether, as I suspect, they stoop. The Vegans I see in Vancouver carry those unhealthy bags under their eyes and that sickly pallor on their face. And frankly I would not want to see much more of them.

Alicia Silverstone and her anti-wool crusade are all about vanity, and Hollywood stoop. As if the baring of a Kardashian's assets are not enough … we must deal with the stooping of a Silverstone … Hollywood, enough all ready.

I sense that Alicia Silverstone lacks the exuberance, the courage and the beautiful of the likes of a Brooke, a Monroe, a Page, a Bardot or a Woodman.

Alicia Silverstone should either step up or stop. She is making a bit of an ass of yourself, both literally and figuratively.


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